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THE TIGER KILLS

The part played by the Fourth and Fifth Indian Divisions in the downfall of Italy's East African empire and in the expulsion of the Vichy French from Syria has already been told in "The Tiger Strikes." The present volume takes up the story from the battle of Sollum, in June 1941, to the final victory in Tunis two years later.

"The Tiger Kills" is mainly concerned with the further exploits of the Fourth Indian Division and other Indian formations composed of British and Indian units, who defied Rommel at a critical period of the world war.

It is the tale of how a handful of very gallant men fought a desperate battle of supplies—for supplies was the fundamental problem of the campaign—against a formidable foe and, by first holding him at a time when their bodies

"Were all our defence, while
we wrought our defences"
and then beating him into submission,
brought imperishable fame on the
might of India's arms.

**THE
TIGER
KILLS**



THE TIGER KILLS

INDIA'S FIGHT IN
THE MIDDLE EAST
AND
NORTH AFRICA

1944

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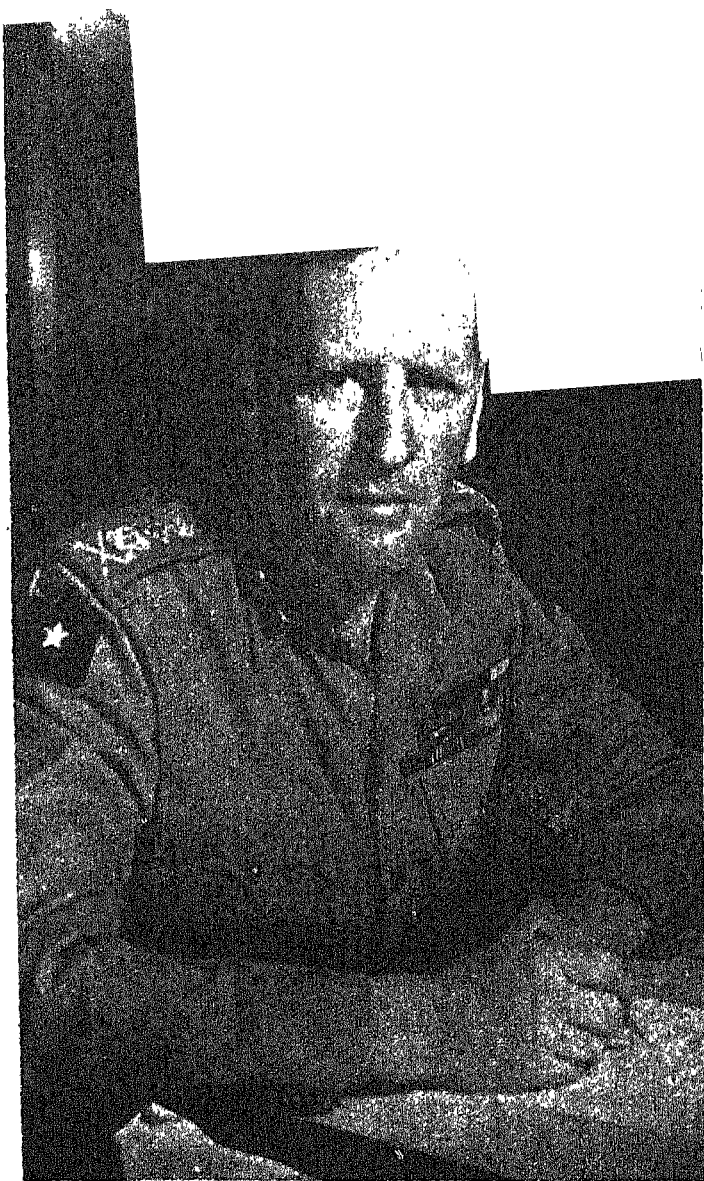
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H. E. General Sir Claude Auchinleck. G.C.I.E., C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O.,
O.B.E., A.D.C., Commander-in-Chief in India.

FOREWORD

by

H. E. GENERAL SIR CLAUDE AUCHINLECK

G.C.I.E., C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., A.D.C.

Commander-in-Chief in India

1. The first formations to go overseas from India were the now renowned 4th and 5th Indian Divisions. The story of their deeds up to the destruction of Italy's East African Empire and the expulsion of the Vichy French from Syria was told in **THE TIGER STRIKES** which was published in India in the autumn of 1942. In the main **THE TIGER STRIKES** was a record of conspicuous success achieved against great numerical odds in the years 1940 and 1941. **THE TIGER KILLS** tells of the fighting against the German by Indian and British soldiers who together composed the formidable fighting formations which went from India to the Middle East. The story is one of further successes, of desperate defence and then of final victory in North Africa.

2. During a greater part of that time, I had the privilege to be in command in the Middle East and was proud and glad to see for myself the dash and courage of these troops from India in attack and also their steadfastness and tenacity in defence.

3. From India's point of view **THE TIGER KILLS** does not tell the whole story. It makes no attempt to describe the sudden threat to India which took shape with such alarming rapidity after the events of the 7th December 1941. It does not show how India stripped herself of trained soldiers and munitions of war to sustain the fight in the West, in spite of the

imminent menace to her own soil. It does not reveal that there were other Indian formations capable, given the opportunity, of emulating the achievements of the 4th, 5th and 10th Indian Divisions. The 8th Indian Division has since achieved an equally proud record in Italy.

4. India is justly proud of the part her troops are taking in the assault on Germany from the south. The day will come when it will be recognised how great this contribution is at a time when India's primary task is to help in the defeat of Japan.

PREFACE

BY the spring of 1941 Rommel and his German Panzer units had appeared in North Africa. The 4th Indian Division, straight from sharing with the 5th Indian Division and others the triumph over Italy at the Battle of Keren in Eritrea, found the Germans and Italians entrenched on the borders of the Egyptian Western Desert while a heroic garrison of Australian, British and Indian troops was holding out at Tobruk behind them. Each adversary had had their first experience of the degree to which the impetus of an offensive drive across the empty spaces of North Africa could be reduced to nothing by the strain on communications and the problem of supply. Yet so thin on the ground were the forces of the British Commonwealth at that moment, when the disasters of Greece and Crete had just occurred, when we were garrisoning Syria and pacifying Axis-inspired rebels in Iraq, that history will probably describe the feat of holding Tobruk, a thorn in Rommel's side, as having saved Egypt as surely as did General Auchinleck's tenacious stand at El Alamein a year later.

This book opens at the time when India's 4th Indian Division was once again in the Western Desert to participate in June, 1941, in the relatively inconclusive battle of Sollum, an action not by any means a success itself but of which it is probably true to say that it postponed enemy plans for full-blooded action against Tobruk for five months. The story continues through all the fluctuations of the Desert Campaign up to the final victory in Tunisia nearly two years later. It is not a narrative of unrelieved success, but it gives an account of the trials of great fighting men

who fought on until they got the tools to finish the job.

Nor was it only a problem of tools. Before the internal combustion engine changed everything the slow construction of railways, pipelines, supply dumps followed by set-piece attacks against prepared positions would have been the procedure. The petrol engine had made possible the rapid tactical moves in battle and it also provided the means to bring supplies in sufficient quantities to keep a battle fluid. The fundamental problem of the North African campaign was, therefore, supplies.

With the exception of a limited quantity of water, everything had to be carried forward to the fighting men. No food or fuel was obtainable in the desert. There was no local labour for use in building roads and railways and to carry out all the chores of an army. When one side retired, its supply problems were eased while those of the other were proportionately increased. Captured vehicles and stores helped the advancing force but could not in any way meet its full requirements.

The battle of supply stretched beyond the North African desert. It was fought along the lines of sea communication, and here the Axis had the advantage. Supplies had only to be brought across the short, though dangerous, sea passage from Italy to Tripoli and Benghazi, while British supplies had to be brought twelve thousand miles round the Cape of Good Hope, the longest lines of communication that any army has ever had in the whole history of war. However heroic the crews of British submarines might be in the clear waters of the Mediterranean, it was impossible to stop the Axis building up their strength in the desert at a rapid rate. What with the shortage of shipping, the late start in the manufacture of war supplies in Britain, the demands of Russia and later of India and

Australia, the British forces were always behind in the race for supplies in the desert—until the autumn of 1942. Throughout the campaign, periods of active operations were always followed by lulls, while both sides strained every nerve to gain the lead.

The war in North Africa lasted for thirty-five months and a few days. Throughout, the outstanding feature was the high morale of the Commonwealth forces. Right from the moment on June 10, 1940, when the little Western Desert Force took the field against the vastly superior and then unknown Italian armies, the conscious superiority of the British forces was superb. Living under the hardest conditions, with the knowledge that the enemy was always ahead in both numbers and material, all men took enormous pride in their own toughness, and waited impatiently for the day when they could have a smack at the enemy, be he German or Italian.

This story tells mainly of the doings of the 4th Indian Division, for this famous formation was engaged more than any other from India. But besides those mentioned in the book, there were others who had the task of waiting and watching on other fronts of the Middle East.

There were many other Indian soldiers in the Middle East, whose work is rarely mentioned. There were the railway units who helped to maintain the railway and push it ever further into the desert. There were the dock companies, whose job it was to handle the weapons and stores as they arrived at the ports. There were the staffs of the great base hospitals, to whom so many men are grateful. There were the Pioneer units who built roads, formed the huge supply dumps and performed the many other vital but unspectacular jobs that keep an army in the field. Much of the work was done in areas which provided a favourite target for enemy bombers. While giving

all honour to the fighting men, let us not forget those who made their victories possible.

The book has been written by Lieut.-Colonel G. R. Stevens, of the Indian Public Relations Staff, and Lieut.-Colonel W. G. Hingston, 1st Punjab Regiment. The facts have been obtained from war diaries and other official documents, from accounts written or told by officers and men who were present in the actions described, and from the stories of Indian Army Observers such as Lieut.-Colonel Desmond Young, M.C., the late Captain Motilal Katju, M.C., and Captain M. K. U. Nayar, M.B.E. This is not a military history. Details of orders are not given, nor are lessons drawn from the actions described. Only such broad strategical considerations are shown as are necessary. The detailed actions of the other formations, British, New Zealand, South African, Australian, Fighting French and Polish, are not told here. It is simply the story of the Indian formations and the British and Indian units in them, told only in as detailed form as will be of general interest. Descriptions of administrative moves are omitted as far as possible, although they must have had an important effect on events.

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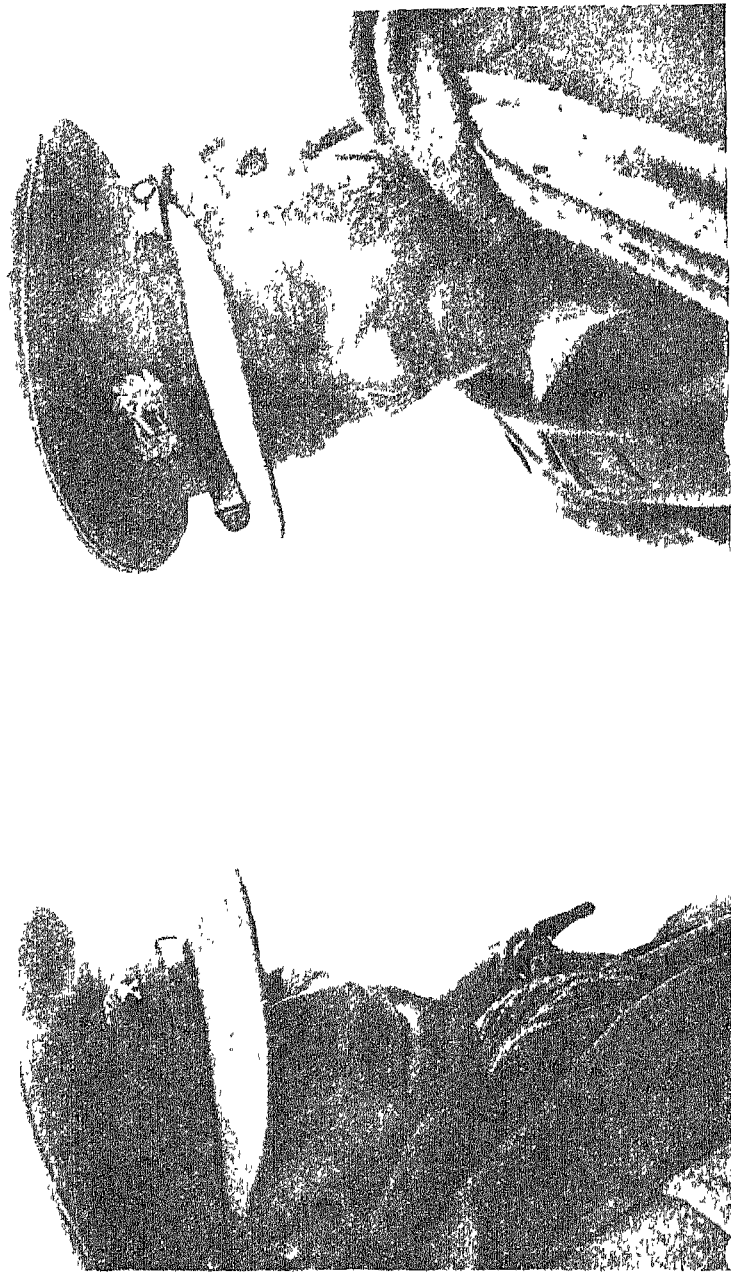
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Lieut.-Colonel D. R. Bateman, D.S.O.

ONE

Desert Battle

THE story opens in June 1941. The 4th Indian Division was back in the Western Desert after its grueling time in Eritrea. The Battle of Keren had ended in complete and overwhelming victory so, leaving the 5th Indian Division to follow up the beaten Italians, the 4th Division hurried back to Egypt to meet the threat of the Afrika Korps, advancing through Cyrenaica. The Division now had a new commander. Major-General F. W. Messervy, former commander of the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade, had taken over from Major-General Sir Noel Beresford-Peirse who had been promoted and left to lead the Western Desert Force.

The 5th Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier W. L. Lloyd) reached Suez only eight days after leaving Keren and packed itself into trains *en route* for Mena, the camp in the shadow of the Pyramids just outside Cairo. There was jubilation at the thought of a few days' rest in comfort for the first time in eight months. But events had occurred in the desert. Benghazi had been lost and the Afrika Korps was surging forward to Egypt. Reinforcements were urgently needed and orders were therefore given that the 5th Brigade should go straight through to the Western Desert.

The other two Brigades also passed through the Delta without a halt and it was not until many months later that the 4th Indian Division came back to civilisation and comfort.

By the end of April the Division was once again concentrated in the Baqqush area. This defended position, covering a vital water supply, had been constructed by the 4th Division and New Zealanders during the previous autumn. The winter dust-storms had filled in the trenches and dug-outs, while most of the corrugated iron and planks of timber had been removed. The work had all to be done again.

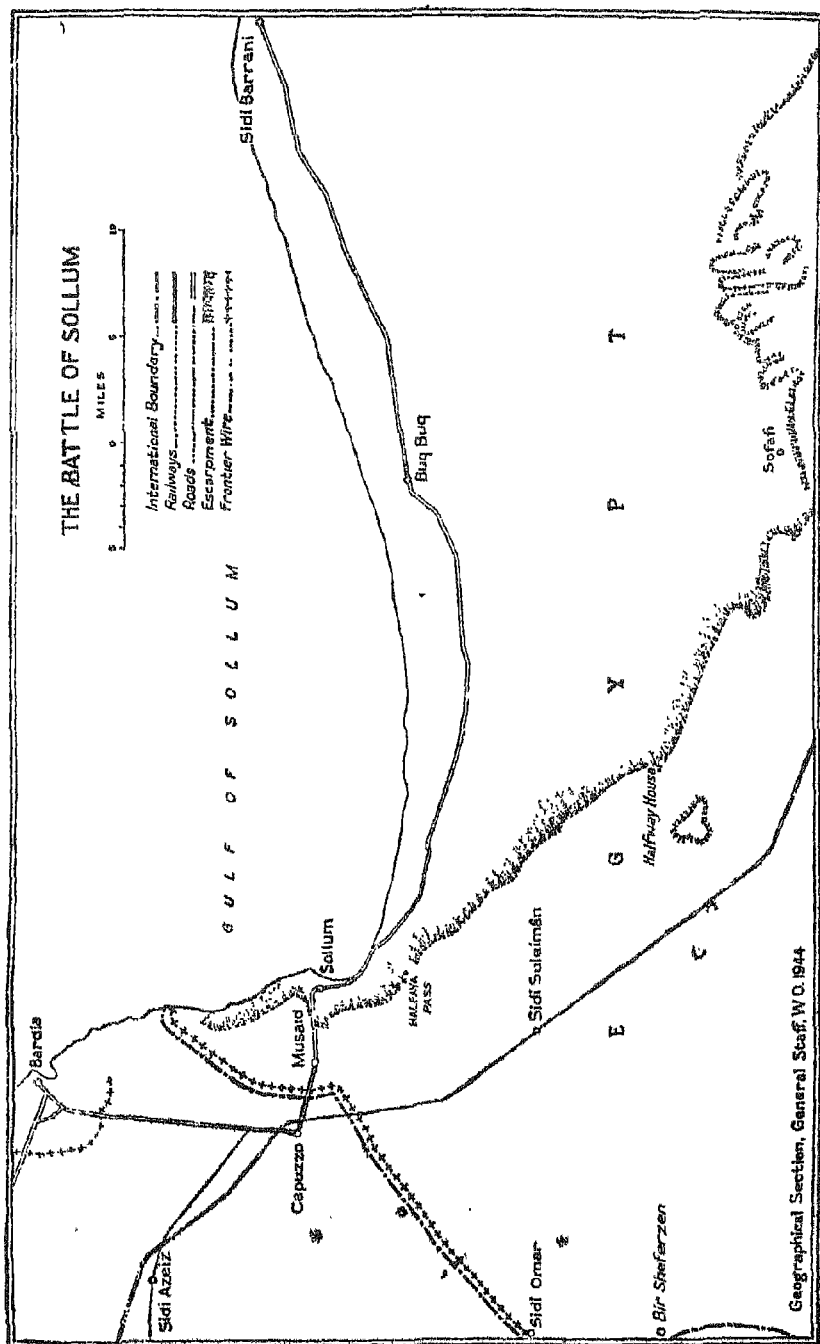
Not for long was the Division to remain as a whole. In May, the 5th Brigade left for Syria, where it covered itself with glory.* Very heavy casualties were suffered and so it did not return until November. Even then some of its units were but shadows of their former selves.

The Battle of Sollum

Early in June the British High Command ordered offensive action, with the intention of destroying all enemy forces east of Tobruk. The object behind the operation was to forestall Rommel's intended attack on Tobruk, and to inflict damage which would make such an attack impossible for several months. In fact it was but part of the battle of supply; to delay the enemy, while armaments were built up throughout the Middle East.

The Sollum battle was mounted with the same boldness of conception and with the same sparse strength that had been so successful in the previous year. General Beresford-Peirse had only four Brigades available for the enterprise, the 7th Indian Infantry

*The story of the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade is told in "The Tiger Strikes." It is one of the most exciting stories of the war.

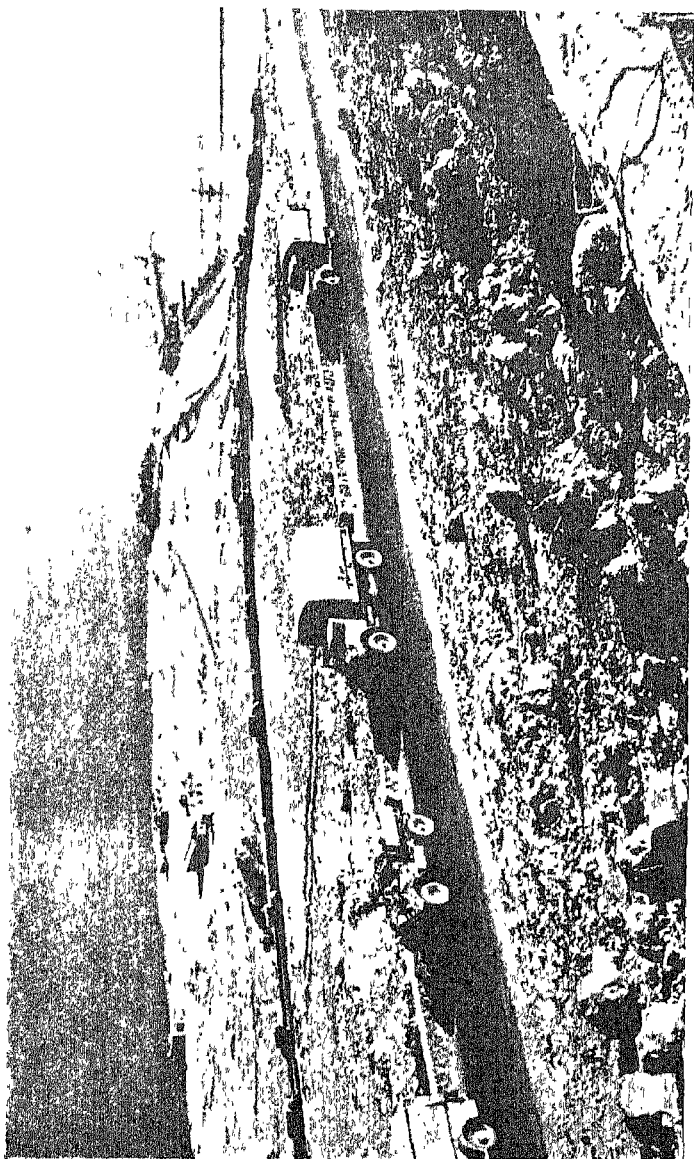


Brigade being immobilised at Baqqush and its vehicles distributed to other formations. The shortage of both men and material was still acute.

The physical feature that directs all manœuvre in the frontier area of Egypt is the escarpment, the scene of more fighting than any other place in this war. In Eastern Cyrenaica the plateau drops to sea level at the coast itself, and continues to do so until the tiny fishing village of Sollum is reached. From there the escarpment, marking the edge of the plateau, sweeps inland, first south and then south-east until it dies away in the broken ground round the old Roman cistern at Sofafi. Between the escarpment and the shore is an undulating area, a veritable hell of dust when the "khamseen" wind blows, and reduced to a quagmire when rain falls. There are but few passes for vehicles up to the plateau from the plain, the main ones being at Sollum, Halfaya and Halfway House. When Sofafi is reached the scarp becomes less steep and there are numerous places where lorries can make their way to the top.

This escarpment is steep bare rock, but the rim of the plateau is not like the edge of a cliff. Many gullies cut their way inland so that the top of the ridge weaves in and out endlessly. From below the whole presents the appearance of a steep, rugged range of hills, all of which are the same height. On the plateau the ground is comparatively smooth, rolling slightly and very gently. It is passable to vehicles everywhere until, about one hundred miles away to the south, the ground drops steeply again to the Siwa Depression.

Axis forces were strongly entrenched on the Halfaya Pass, at Sollum and Bardia, with posts at Musaid and Capuzzo. The main enemy army was in the Tobruk area, watching the perimeter and, it was



A view of the escarpment taken from the road up the Sollum Pass

believed, preparing for an assault on the fortress. The main body of armour was in that area also, one day's march from the frontier and so able either to strike at Tobruk or to assist the enemy garrisons at Bardia and Halfaya.

The Western Desert Force was organised in two different forces for the start of this battle, and for the sake of clarity they will be called "Coast Force" and "Escarpment Force." "Coast Force" was ordered to storm the Halfaya Pass, while "Escarpment Force" was to penetrate to the north-west, cutting the communications of the Sollum—Halfaya—Capuzzo triangle. As tanks could not be used against the precipitous eastern approaches of Halfaya, "Escarpment Force" was given practically all the armour, consisting of the 7th Armoured Division. The 22nd Guards Brigade, under the command of the 4th Indian Division, comprised the infantry of "Escarpment Force." It included the 1st Bn. The Buffs, who later joined the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade. After the capture of the Halfaya position the armour accompanying the infantry of "Escarpment Force" would join the armoured division for the battle of tanks that was bound to follow.

"Coast Force" consisted of the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade, with attached troops, all under the command of Brigadier R. A. Savory. It moved up from Mersa Matruh early in June. The Brigade marched the entire distance—130 miles—a significant commentary on the shortage of transport and also on the fitness of the men, since June in the desert is scarcely the month for foot-slogging. By the night of June 13, it was in position down in the coastal plain, astride the main road some fifteen miles east of the Pass. This part of the force consisted of the 2nd Bn. 5th Mahratta Light Infantry and the 1st Bn. 6th

Rajputana Rifles* with the 25th Field Regiment R.A., the 4th Field Company Bengal Sappers and Miners, and various other smaller units. On top of the escarpment near Sofafi was the 2nd Bn. Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and a squadron of "I" tanks. In this hot and dusty region the men waited for zero hour.

On the late afternoon of June 14 the Plateau Force set off westward in desert formation. On the right flank moved the Cameron Highlanders, accompanied by the squadron of the 4th Bn. Royal Tank Regiment in their "I" tanks. With them also went the carrier platoons of the three battalions of the 7th Indian Brigade. The 7th British Armoured Brigade, moving through the night, pierced deep into enemy territory, cutting the trails into Capuzzo from the north and west. The Guards, supported by the 7th Royal Tank Regiment, old friends of the 4th Division from Sidi Barrani days, were in action round Capuzzo throughout June 15.

Shortly after first light on that day, the Camerons with their tanks neared the top of the Pass. As they came within striking distance they came under heavy and accurate fire from well-sited guns. This was the first encounter with the German 88-mm. dual purpose gun: the Germans had inflicted a surprise in armaments in their turn. This high velocity gun, originally designed for anti-aircraft use, had been given a mounting enabling it to be used against ground targets also. Its flat trajectory and terrific hitting power made it a deadly weapon. The "I" tank had neither the armour nor range to cope with it. Eleven out of the twelve tanks were knocked out immediately. The fate of the operation was decided in those few minutes.

* Indian Army infantry regiments are numbered consecutively from one to nineteen, and Gurkha regiments from one to ten. The number is an integral part of the title of the regiment and should always be included. This is particularly important in the case of the Punjab and Gurkha regiments. The battalion number is always placed before the regimental number, e.g. 9/14th Punjab Regiment is the 9th Bn. 14th Punjab Regiment.

The Camerons, however, passing their shattered tanks, surged forward to try to carry the summit of the Pass with the bayonet. One company, under Captain Hugo Haig, had actually reached the road, when suddenly a squadron of tanks charged from the shelter of a low ridge and overran the Scotsmen. A draft of recruits had arrived only two days previously and had not yet had time to absorb the wisdom of the veterans. The youngsters were nearly all lost, but the old hands dodged the tanks and took cover in the gullies at the top of the escarpment. The position of the whole battalion was precarious. The remaining companies side-slipped over the edge of the cliff. In this position it was impossible for tanks to close with them, while infantry did not dare. There the battalion remained, spectators in a natural stadium, several hundred feet above the battle being staged on the broken ridges below.

The Fight on the Escarpment

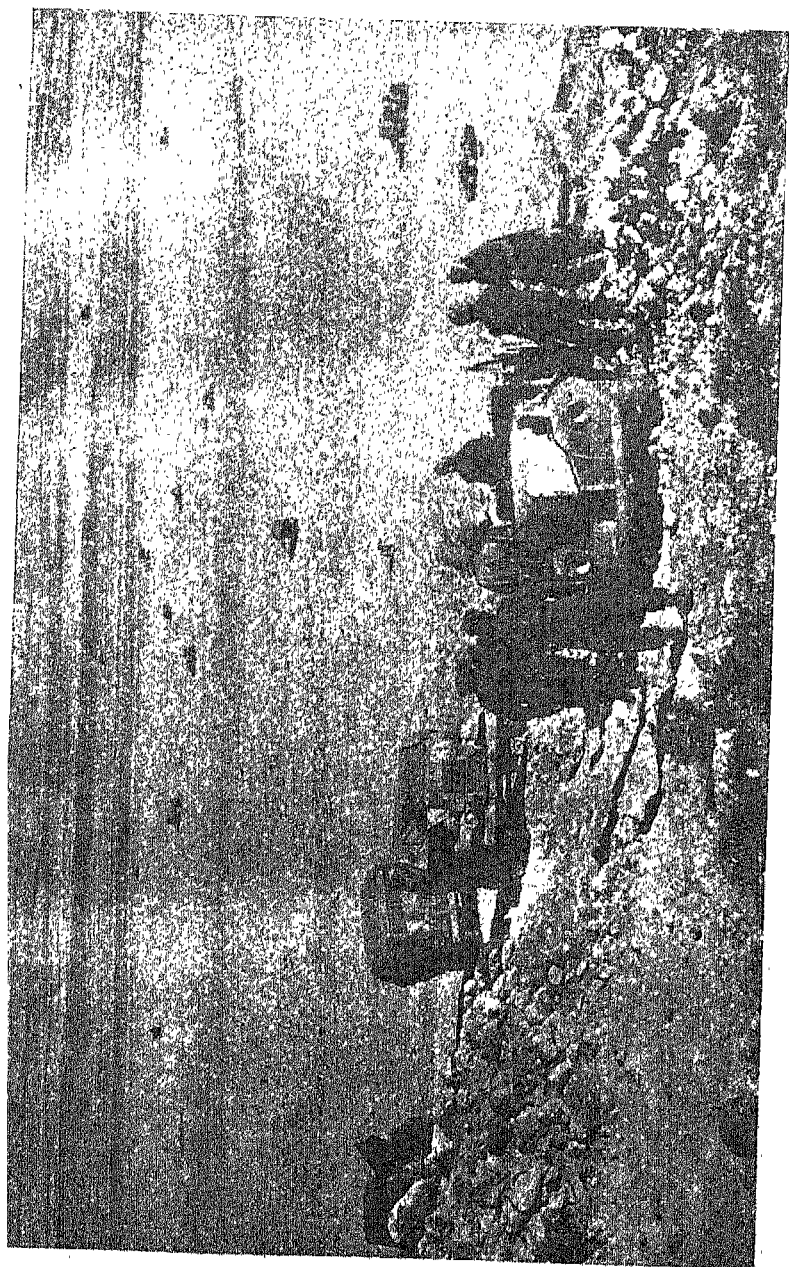
"Coast Force" moved from its forming up area in the early hours of the morning. The Mahrattas led, with the "Raj Rif" following, while the 25th Field Regiment were ready to give support. The units sought the cover of the hills several miles east of Halfaya, and worked their way along the glacis. This was done for fear of a tank attack from the defences which ran across the plain to the sea from the foot of the pass. The Indians climbed slowly across the ridges and gullies making for the head of the road. Six "I" tanks accompanied the right company to deal with any strong points met on the plain.

As the infantry went forward from their start line in the morning light, heavy fire was opened from the ridges and from the top of the escarpment, where observation was good. Casualties were suffered, but the Indian infantry pushed on with the utmost

determination, working their way along the ravines and up the slopes. Individual Tommy-gunners climbed the rocky wadis to fight to the death with the enemy outposts. Sepoy Babu Desai of the Mahrattas, only eighteen years old, took command of his section when its commander was wounded. When the company was held up, he picked up his Bren gun, rushed across the open under heavy fire, and brought the gun into action from the flank, enabling the company to move on again. Then he was wounded in the leg and his platoon commander told him to go back to the Regimental Aid Post to have the wound dressed. But Babu Desai had other views. He rushed the gun that had wounded him, killing the gunner and making the others run. Then his leg gave way under him, but still he had to be forcibly placed on a stretcher before he would even consider his own troubles.

As the day wore on it became clear that the advance across the broken ridges was going to be extremely difficult. The crests of the escarpment provided commanding positions from which the movements of the Indian battalions could be seen. When night fell the 11th Brigade had little to show for a hard day's fighting.

Early in the day four out of the six "I" tanks ran on an uncharted minefield guarding the defences at the foot of the Pass, and were immobilised. There they remained under very heavy fire. There were no 88-mm. guns on the coastal plain, but shells and bullets were clanging against the armour continually. It now became a sappers' job. Before the tanks could be removed, the extent of the minefield had to be discovered. Yet there were the tanks, stuck among the mines, and only five hundred yards from the enemy. Lieutenant N. B. Thomas of the 4th Field Company carried out the reconnaissance alone under intense fire. Coolly and deliberately he searched the



A view across the coastal plain from the escarpment.

ground, the tank commander being killed while actually hearing his report. Then the Sappers came forward and removed the mines—dangerous, cold-blooded work. During the following night the tanks were recovered.

After dark, preparations were made for the next day's attack by the two Indian battalions, assisted by the battered Camerons at the top of the ridge. Shortly before the attack was due to start, all communications with the artillery forward observation officer were cut. The attack was called off. The battalions were ordered to fight their own way forward independently.

During that night a Mahratta sepoy, carrying water forward to the front-line troops, wandered into the enemy lines and was captured. The Germans were too busy to post a guard on him, so they removed his boots and socks, thinking that he could not escape barefoot. They ought to have known better, having seen the barefoot Indians win the world hockey championship in Berlin in 1935. The sepoy slipped his captors, crept deeper and deeper into the enemy lines, reached the sea and started to wade back. Keeping as far out as he could get, he rounded the enemy defences and was eventually picked up by the Central India Horse, numbed with cold and utterly weary, but safe.

The Attack Goes On

Air reconnaissance on the evening of June 15 revealed large enemy columns on the main road and trails from Tobruk. It was certain that the British Tank Brigades would be faced with strong opposition next day. It was therefore necessary for them to make dispositions to meet the threat and to leave the capture of the escapement area to the infantry.

At 2.30 a.m. on June 16, the Scots Guards carried Musaid with the bayonet. Eighteen Italians were

killed and seventy-two captured at the cost of seven guardsmen wounded. The victors embussed at dawn and pressed onwards to the top of the escarpment above Sollum. The artillery put down a heavy "shoot" on the barracks, which stand on the top of the cliffs above the Mediterranean, a landmark visible for many miles around. Again the bayonets gleamed and the Scotsmen dashed in with wild yells. For the loss of two killed and six wounded, thirty of the enemy were left dead and two hundred and twenty made prisoner. The heights above Sollum were in our hands.

The Buffs, however, who as garrison of Capuzzo guarded the rear of the guardsmen, encountered enemy reinforcements early in the day. Artillery opened upon them at 10 a.m. and shortly afterwards forty light tanks attempted to rush the position. They fell back before the fire of the British tanks, to the annoyance of the 31st Field Regiment, who had held their fire hoping that the panzers would come close and get properly blasted.

These panzers proved to be the advanced guard of a force of approximately a hundred tanks, of which about half were the heavy Mark III and Mark IV types. The light and medium panzers deployed in a crescent masking Capuzzo, while the heavy tanks lumbered southward. Their object was plain. The enemy intended to seize the passes down the escarpment east of Halfaya and so seal up the British lines of retreat. The raiders could then be destroyed at leisure. The armoured battle would decide the day, unless the 11th Brigade could storm the Pass and so secure uninterrupted lines of communication.

On the morning of June 16, the 11th Brigade renewed its assaults on Halfaya. The road itself runs up a spur to the north-west of the Wadi Halfaya, which is a deep gully running far into the plateau, its sides quite precipitous at the top end. On the east side of



One of the wadis in the Halfaya position.

the wadi is another spur, varying in width from a few yards to four hundred where it joins the plateau. In the gully to the east of this spur were the Camerons, with the Rajputana Rifles further down. Half-way down the escarpment is a fairly flat step, and below this the hill drops steeply once again to the plain. The Mahrattas were on this lower part of the hill and on the plain itself. The Camerons battled forward at the top, but on the flat plateau were unable to make any progress against intense small arms fire. On the rest of the front progress was slow and costly. Every approach was covered by well-sited guns and machine-guns.

Just before dark all the guns of the 25th Field Regiment were brought to bear on the two little knolls that command the head of the Pass. Wellesley's* flung themselves forward yet again and crossed the spur to the edge of the great gully of the Wadi Halfaya. There they found themselves raked by a murderous fire from the further bank of the great trench. Later the graves of more than forty Rajputana Rifles were found just along the crest, where the Germans had buried them. Lieut.-Colonel P. R. H. Skrine was killed, and after making five hundred yards—with only another five hundred to go—the Raj Rif were pinned down. The Mahrattas actually got into the bottom of the wadi, gallantly fighting onward, but terribly galled by fire from the defences on the plain. All night the indomitable 11th Brigade, still heavily shot at, clinging like limpets to the dour slopes, re-organised for the morrow when, in spite of heavy losses, it was hoped to cover those last few hundred yards.

* The full title of the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles is the 1st Bn. (Wellesley's) 6th Rajputana Rifles, named after Sir Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington, under whom the battalion served at the beginning of the last century. The 4th battalion of the regiment, which also has a prominent part in this story, is known as "Outram's," and these two names are frequently used in this book.

Withdrawal

Their bravery was destined to come to nought. On the afternoon of that day, the heavy panzers crashed into the two armoured brigades north of Sidi Omar. The battle which followed was typically battle-ships *versus* cruisers. Holding the lighter British armour at extreme range, where the two-pounder shells did little or no damage, the heavier guns of the German panzers smashed their opponents at small loss to themselves. In the early hours of June 17, two tank regiments reported only nineteen runners between them. The 7th Armoured Brigade was calling for help near Sidi Omar. In response to this plea the scanty tank force with the Guards Brigade was sent down south, although this left the infantry dangerously exposed to the enemy's armour.

At 10 a.m. on June 17, the news arrived that the tank battle had been renewed east of Sidi Omar and that the British armour was being pressed back across the frontier. With Sollum and Halfaya still firmly in the enemy's grip, the corridor for withdrawal was narrowing every hour. There was no alternative but to retire.

Fourth Division Headquarters therefore ordered the Guards Brigade to withdraw along the top of the escarpment. This withdrawal was carried out expeditiously and well, under circumstances of great difficulty. The enemy tanks managed to burst through and reach Bir Nuh, only three miles from the escarpment and well to the east of Halfaya. This should have completely blocked the route of the Guards but the 4th Armoured Brigade, mustering a mixed force of tanks and guns, smashed back one rush after another, keeping the narrowest of corridors open. The 31st Field Regiment, with its guns right out in the open, covered the line of withdrawal; these gunners by

their very boldness gained precious hours. It was not done without loss. Another field regiment was a target for Stukas and lost nearly one hundred men, but the infantry were able to pull out successfully.

Division Headquarters had an exciting drive back, being chased by tanks for some distance. The G.S.O.I. (Lieut.-Colonel Donald Bateman) seemed to be singled out as a special target by Stukas as well as tanks. In desert warfare Division Headquarters has to be just as mobile as any unit. Sometimes it will move several times in a day, a severe strain on the organisation and especially on the Signals. After the last war a flood of books poured odium on "the Staff," tarring with the same brush the staffs of fighting formations as well as "base wallahs." Whatever may be the truth of those somewhat Litter books, it is certainly not true of the headquarters of Brigades and Divisions in this war. They are always just behind the front line troops and share the same hardships as the men they command. Later in the campaign, Division Headquarters, admittedly by mistake, led the pursuit after Rommel's retreating forces.

Late in the evening of June 17 the last portions of Plateau Force filed down the narrow track at Halfway House or arrived back at Sofafi.

All day while the fate of their comrades hung in the balance, the 11th Brigade clung grimly to the approaches of Halfaya, which for these men had certainly earned its nickname of Hellfire. They had reached the crest of the escarpment only to be blown back by blasts of fire, the enemy turning on every type of gun, including huge fortress cannon, brought from the Mareth Line in Tunisia.

Late that afternoon orders came for withdrawal to begin as soon as night fell. At 8.15 p.m. enemy lorried infantry began to work down the escarpment

well in rear, with a view to cutting off retreat. A battery of the 25th Field Regiment swung into action and scattered this force.

The flank and rear of the Camerons and Rajputana Rifles were threatened by armoured cars, which rushed about on top of the spurs in front and behind shooting down the gullies, and by infantry which began to infiltrate down from the top. Subedar Ferozo Khan at once, on his own initiative, brought his 3-inch mortars into action in a position swept by machine-gun fire. He so plastered the enemy that the attack petered out and that threat was stopped. Havildar Sardara Ram's section was left to the very last to cover the withdrawal. When the time to move came every single piece of equipment was brought back, the heavy gear being man-handled for seven miles after four exhausting days.

Withdrawal began at 9.10 p.m. The Camerons and Wellesley's went down the wadis to the plain. In addition to the attack from the top of the escarpment, another developed from the bottom of the Pass onto the Mahrattas. One company was practically surrounded, but was brilliantly led out by Subedar Pandurang Chavan, through the enemy, across a minefield and then through weak points in the enemy barrage.

The carriers of the Camerons were in an exceedingly tight spot. They were unable to get down the escarpment with the battalion, and on top of the plateau were numerous enemy tanks and armoured cars. During the night Lieutenant A. G. Cameron led them back through the enemy, arriving at Sofafi to find Plateau Force already gone. This little party set off back as rearguard to the whole force and eventually reached Baqqush safely. Actually the Axis had not followed up, either with their panzers or infantry.

Judging by the number of graves later found at Halfaya, bearing the dates of the action, the Germans and Italians had received a severe mauling at the hands of the 11th Brigade, so much so that they were unable to exploit their success.

Disengagement was successfully made and the tired, thirsty troops started on their long march back. Before Buq Buq was reached, lorries arrived and carried all back to Baqqush.

After the Battle of Sollum the pipes of the Cameron Highlanders composed a march and presented it to the 1st Bn. 6th Rajputana Rifles in memory of Colonel Skrine. It was called "With Wellesley's Rifles at Keren," an outward sign of the friendship of these two great battalions.

TWO

The Summer Wears On

THE Battle of Sollum was not a success, but it had achieved its main object in that it prevented Rommel mounting an attack against Tobruk. During the following months the two armies set to work to build up their strength. The Battle of Supply began once more.

The essential preliminary to any Axis advance into Egypt was the capture of Tobruk, the running sore on Rommel's lines of communication. British plans had to be made with the object of forestalling such an attack, for if the Axis forces fell upon the fortress in full strength it must surely fall. General Auchinleck ordered his attack to start five days before Rommel's assault on Tobruk was due.

Tobruk 1941

The story of the siege of Tobruk is not properly part of this book. It is the story of the tough British and Australian troops who formed the bulk of the garrison. No sooner had these men entered the fortress than the enemy arrived. Rommel was utterly confident that Tobruk was his, so much so that some of his staff officers drove into the port in their cars, ready to make arrangements for its use as a base—and continued their journey to Egypt in the care of the Royal Navy.

Then attacks began and continued for weeks. They were beaten back in desperate fighting. After this initial period of offence the Axis forces set to work to seal off the tough nut, until such time as their forces were powerful enough to overwhelm its obstinate garrison. The attack was continued from the air and, deprived of fighter cover, the men in the fortress had a hard time. All the captured Italian anti-aircraft guns were brought into use for the defence of the harbour, and to revenge themselves for the hell endured from the air the garrison went out each night to kill the enemy on the ground. Throughout that summer and autumn the defenders stood firm, waiting for the time when the Eighth Army, successor to the Western Desert Force, would come to its relief.

The Indian Army was represented in Tobruk by the 18th King Edward VII's Own Cavalry, who came into Tobruk after the action at Mekili, in which only one of its squadrons had been engaged. The regiment was given a sector of the perimeter to hold which stretched from the sea, west of the town, nearly to the Derna road. From the shore the land rises steeply in one of those escarpments so common in the desert. It is cut by deep wadis running back into the low plateau. The main line of defence was made on the Wadi-es-Sehel, a precipitous gully with offshoots on its western side. Every little bit of this ground was to become familiar to the cavalymen in the next five months.

No full-scale attack ever developed on the regiment's sector: the wadi made an impassable tank obstacle. But it was never quiet. For the first month there was frequent heavy shelling and considerable infantry activity. Thereafter never a day passed without the enemy artillery strafing some part of the line. More often than not Regimental Headquarters were the unlucky winners in this lottery. The British

gunners had insufficient ammunition to reply as often as the Indians would have liked, and so the 18th Cavalry proceeded to seek vengeance in infantry fashion.

At night patrols used to go out to capture or kill the enemy and to fray the nerves of the Italians. These small parties of a dozen or more men would pass through the enemy lines, shooting up supply parties and raiding sangars. Here is an account of one night raid.

In the night of July 25/26 a raiding party of two Viceroy Commissioned Officers* and sixteen Rajputs set out into enemy territory. The object was laid down as the infliction of the maximum damage possible and the bringing back of prisoners for identification.

It was a dark moonless night. The party moved silently on, got behind an enemy sangar and crept up to within twenty-five yards of it. Then they charged. One can imagine what it was like for the nervous Italians when these fierce silent figures suddenly loomed up out of the darkness. Two, trying to get away to the rear, ran straight on to the bayonets of the cavalymen and were killed. The attack went on—no longer silent—and the remaining eight men in the sangar were also bayoneted. Fire was opened from other positions but the party then turned westward and stormed two more sangars some six hundred yards further into the enemy lines. Eight Italians were bayoneted in the first and seven more were slaughtered with bomb and bayonet in the second. Finally two more were finished off in a machine-gun post.

By now the whole sector of the front was roused and tracer bullets were cutting pretty patterns in the

*The Viceroy Commissioned Officer is a rank peculiar to the Indian Army. They are senior to Warrant Officers but junior to Commissioned Officers. In the cavalry, the three ranks are Risaldar Major, Risaldar and Jemadar. In the infantry they are Sutadar Major, Subedar and Jemadar. There is one Risaldar Major or Subedar Major in each regiment or battalion.

darkness. The party, having killed twenty-seven of the enemy, made its way back safely without casualty.

A paragraph in the report of the commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel H.O.W. Fowler, is illuminating. He wrote:—"I wish to express my regret that no prisoners nor actual identifications were brought back. In mitigation of this I would explain that it was the first time this troop had ever been in with the Layonet. The men saw red at the first attack and after that appeared oblivious of everything except killing the enemy. Jemadar Amar Singh, on being questioned as to why no identifications had been brought back, explained that they were under continuous fire; his men were thoroughly roused and in the darkness and excitement of the moment the only consideration was to KILL, KILL, KILL."

On another occasion a patrol of some forty Italians approached a small post on the western side of the wadi, manned by a V.C.O. and six men. Seeing the enemy approaching in the gloom, the V.C.O. played a magnificent bluff. Rising to his feet he let out a roar, "B Squadron, CHARGE!" And those seven men jumped from the flea-ridden trench and chased the forty Italians back the way they had come.

And so the months passed by. Towards the end of September the regiment was relieved. Back to the Delta it went, but the *Luftwaffe*, or it may have been the Regia Aeronautica, had a last smack at them as they went aboard the destroyer in Tobruk harbour. The attack failed and the 18th Cavalry arrived safely in Alexandria, where with the other "Gentlemen of Tobruk" the sowars* threw their chests with the best.

*The non-commissioned ranks in the Indian Armoured Corps are as follows:—

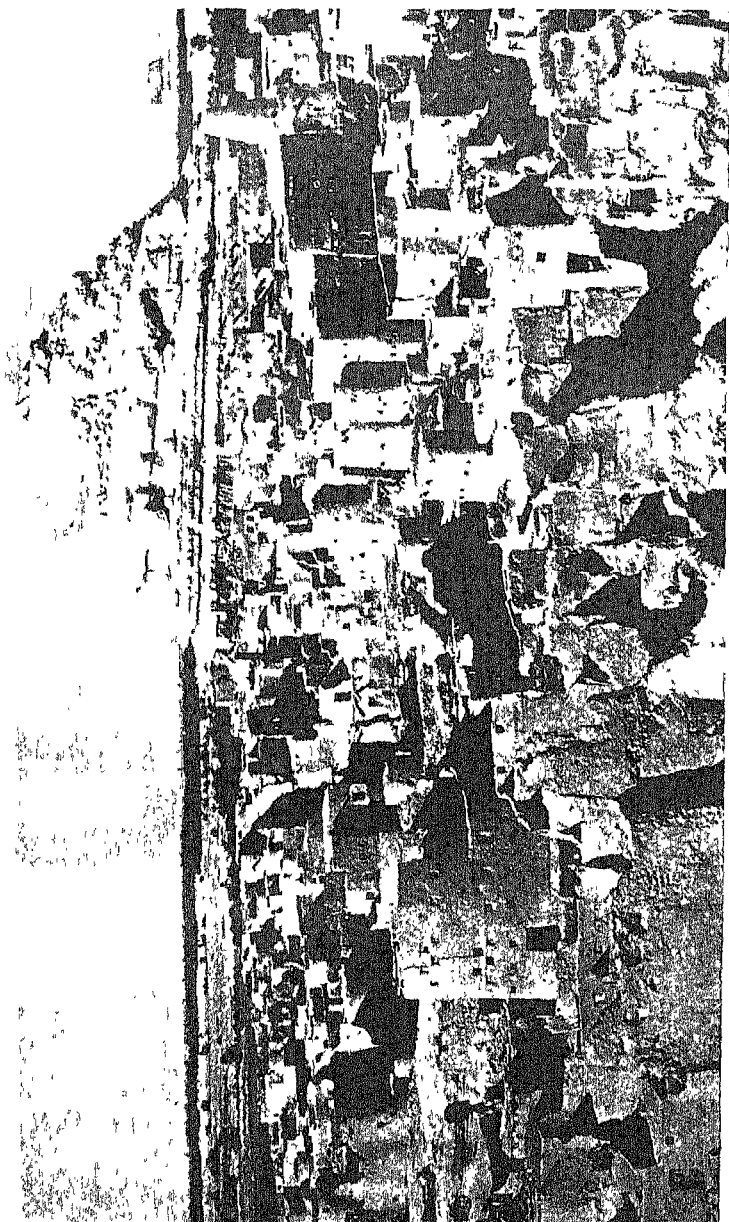
Sergeant	≈	Daffadar
Corporal	≈	Lance-Daffadar
Lance-Corporal	≈	Acting Lance-Daffadar
Trooper	≈	Sowar

The story of the 18th Cavalry in Tobruk would not be complete without mention of Admiral Sir Walter Cowan. At the outbreak of the war he placed his services at the disposal of the Admiralty, who replied with regret that a man of seventy-one really was too old for active employment. Not content to sit down in England when the country had an enemy to fight, he wangled his way to the Middle East. After partaking in a commando raid on Bardia, he came to Tobruk. No one knew what his job was, but all were only too happy to help this tough old man.

Once inside the fortress he met the 18th Cavalry and by them was at once appointed their Regimental Naval Liaison Officer, acting, temporary, honorary, unpaid and all the other adjectives that are used to indicate unofficial appointments. He was always in the line, showing the most complete contempt of shell fire; he could not hear the shells coming so, as he said, why worry about the —— things. It was his great sorrow that Colonel Fowler would not allow him to accompany the Indians on their raiding parties. As a risaldar remarked to his squadron commander:—
“If your old men are like this whatever hope can the Germans have of beating you.”

The Oases

In August, the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade took over garrison duties at Siwa and Jarabub. The Oases of Siwa, Jarabub and Jalo are spaced in a great triangle in the interior of the Libyan Desert on an average of very roughly two hundred miles from the coast. They form the western portion of the great Qatara Depression, a few feet below sea level. Siwa, two hundred miles south of Mersa Matruh, is a settlement of great antiquity, with a history in which fact and fantasy are inextricably mingled. At one time Siwa boasted an oracle, second only in reputation to that



Siwa.

of Delphos and consulted by Alexander the Great before he set out on his march to India.

To-day the oasis has a flourishing community, specialising in handloom weaving and the packing of high class table dates. The story of the "browned-off" private of the Royal Sussex, bored to tears by flies, brackish water and the unending monotony of dry ration diet, who opened his first parcel from home for six months to find it contained delicate dates from Siwa, is one of those apocryphal anecdotes that deserve to be true.

One hundred and fifty miles west of Siwa and about the same distance south of Sollum, lies the Oasis of Jarabub, also well known to the ancients. Although only a small village of some 150 stone houses the oasis is famous for its small Senussi university and the tomb of Mohammed Ben Senussi, founder of the sect.

The importance of these oases lies in their supply of water, the only obtainable in the desert south of the coast, and also in their position on the flank of the desert armies. No ground attack ever developed on the oases while the 7th Brigade was there, but the enemy air forces paid considerable attention to these isolated garrisons.

From Jarabub the Brigade carried out intensive and long-distance patrolling of the desert across the frontier, while a very large dump of stores was formed in the oasis. This patrolling required great skill in navigation, and gave all the ranks a thorough knowledge of the desert, which was later to stand them in good stead. The Germans, in a captured document, described the Brigade as "a unit which patrols very vigorously." They learnt to respect and fear this formation for other reasons before six months were up.

Battalion Headquarters of the 4th Bn. 11th Sikh Regiment were established in the fort at Jarabub,

which had been built by the Italians to guard the southern end of the frontier wire, a great fence, fifteen feet wide and guarded by block-houses, erected to prevent the Senussi crossing over the frontier into Egypt. The Jarabub Fort is typical of those described in P.C. Wren's "Beau Geste"—from the outside. Inside it was very different, with electric light, running water, long baths, refrigerator and a fine recreation room.

Shortly after their arrival, the Sikhs were bombed in the fort and suffered more than thirty casualties. The Battalion Headquarters moved to the sand hills, safer if less salubrious, and watched further enemy attempts to hit the same target. Though made from a low height and with a large number of bombs these attempts were singularly unsuccessful, although the shrine some distance away was damaged. This shrine of the founder of the Senussi sect was cared for by the Muslim soldiers in the battalion, since all the inhabitants had had to be removed.

The chief recollection left in the minds of those who lived at Jarabub is the haze of flies. They were present by the million, great black swarms of them. They had all the persistence of the finest Egyptian variety, who never waste time playing together or just buzzing about, but give their undivided attention to their human victims. Flies were the worst feature of the desert campaign although, when a former Italian position was occupied, fleas were a good second. In one gunner mess it was a rule that every officer, before he could have a drink either with or before his lunch, had to kill thirty flies. The late arrivals sometimes had difficulty in earning their beer or even their water. One day the Commanding Officer returned late—hot, dirty and tired—and wearily picked up the fly swat. At that moment his batman entered the dug-out and handed him a plate with the words "Your

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flies, sir." Neatly arranged on the plate were thirty corpses.

In November the 7th Brigade was relieved by the 29th Brigade of the 5th Indian Division and returned to the desert.

Patrolling

Early in autumn, the 11th Brigade moved forward to the defence lines on the coastal plain near Buq Buq. In this hot and excessively dusty area the Brigade had two main tasks. One was the improvement of the position, a never ending job, for no commander is ever quite satisfied with his defences. The other task was patrolling.

"Patrol Activity." How very little these words convey to the normal listener to the news on the wireless. Yet they always cover tiring, dangerous work, and often deeds of daring and courage. The front line troops spend far more of their time patrolling than on any other form of military activity. The vigour with which they carry out their work may make just the difference between success or failure in the battles to come.

Many of these patrols are unspectacular, but others are full of action. There was a time when Lieutenant J. McA. Hadden, D.S.O., 1/6th Rajputana Rifles, set out with a section to explore the defences below the Halfaya Pass. He had won his decoration in Eritrea; a D.S.O. for a subaltern is a very high award. Heavy fire was opened upon the patrol and Hadden was killed. Havildar Chatterbuj Singh tried hard to bring his body in under fire, but failed. He therefore brought his officer's pistol and ammunition back, to prevent their falling into enemy hands; and also he brought back valuable information about the positions in the area.

On another night Lance-Daffadar Ram Bhaj, of the Central India Horse, had an exciting time with four other men of his regiment. Out of the darkness a strong patrol of about thirty men appeared only seventy yards away. Although heavily outnumbered Ram Bhaj took careful aim at the leader, fired and had the satisfaction of seeing him fall. The enemy retired a short distance and opened heavy fire. The lance-daffadar was not deterred. He crawled forward, disarmed and captured the German officer who proved to be only very slightly wounded and offered stout resistance. Ram Bhaj knew the importance of bringing him back alive; so, still under heavy fire, he crawled back to his party dragging the officer with him. But the German had no intention of being captured if he could avoid it. He grappled with the Indian and shouted to his men for help. Ram Bhaj thereupon dealt a blow, which while incapacitating his prisoner, did him no permanent damage. His party then withdrew, bluffing the enemy by skilful use of Tommy and Bren-gun, and the intelligence staff was truly grateful for his prize.

But patrolling is not always at night. Frequently small parties, consisting of an officer or Viccroy Commissioned Officer with one sepoy, used to creep close up to the bottom of the Halfaya Pass during the night. All the next day they would lie out concealed by a small bush or stone, watching the enemy's position, counting the vehicles on the road, noting where there was anything happening. The slightest movement would give away their position and would bring a stream of bullets.

All through the autumn this work continued, preparing for the coming offensive. One small truck of the C.I.H. used to go out at night and drive about behind the enemy's lines, noting minefields, tracks, emplacements, leaguers and all the rest. On one

occasion the party met a German car coming towards them in the moonlight on the same track. The British truck was driven straight ahead and passed within five yards of the Germans, who never suspected that it could belong to their enemy, so far behind the front line.

Preparing to Attack

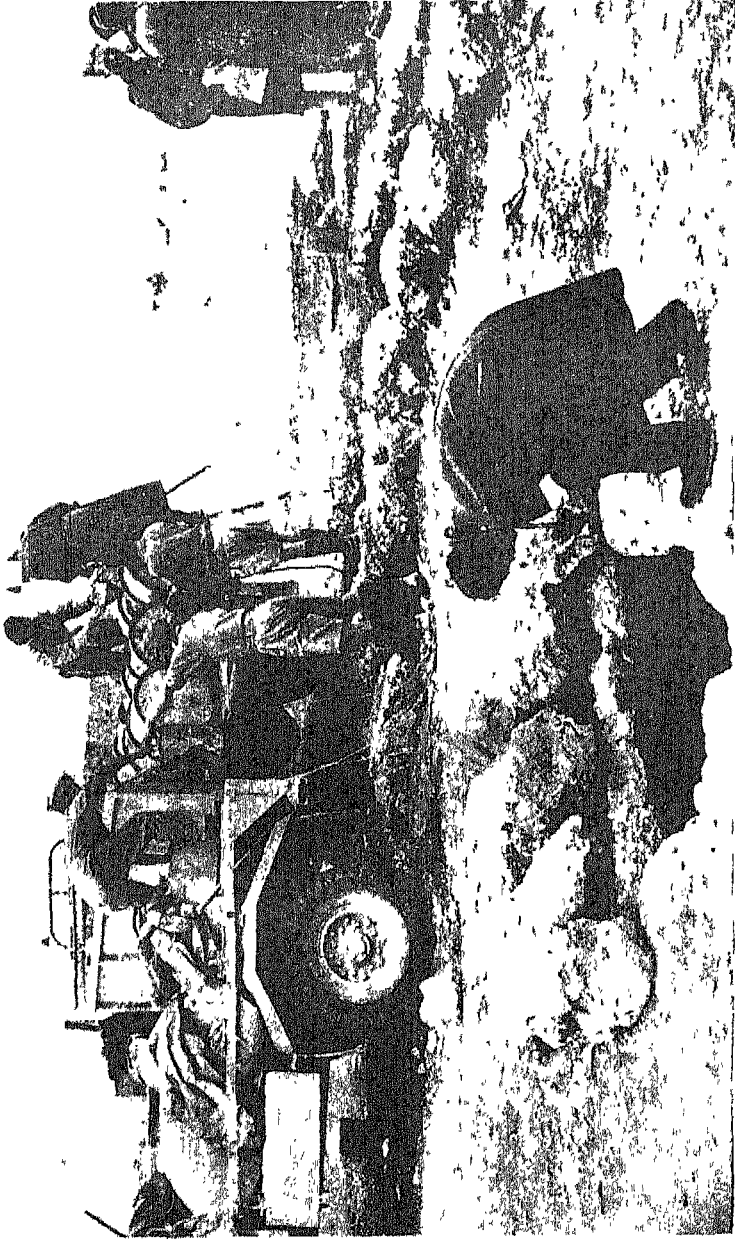
From June to October 1941, the Western Desert Force was on the defensive. In the frontier area mobile forces watched the Germans, while behind them fortresses were built. One hundred and twenty-five miles east of Sollum vast minefields covered the small port and airfields of Matruh. Sixty miles further east, the Baqqush "box" was enlarged and strengthened. Sixty miles back from there, the bottleneck between El Alamein and the Qatara Depression was surveyed for a final defensive line to cover the Nile Delta.

These defensive measures were precautionary. General Sir Claude Auchinleck, who had taken over the command of the Middle East from General Wavell, had no intention of waiting for the enemy to attack. The Desert Army was as pugnacious as ever, and confident of its ability to beat Rommel, his Afrika Korps or anything else he liked to bring against it. The fighting spirit of the "desert rats" was passed on to the new arrivals. In September it was decided to mount a full-scale offensive against the enemy in Cyrenaica at the earliest opportunity.

From his headquarters near Gambut, west of Bardia, General Rommel must have watched the British preparations with interest and, undoubtedly, with confidence. His defences were strong. Bardia and the heights at Halfaya had been turned into fortresses, unapproachable from the sea and believed impregnable from the land. Round Tobruk were deep defences sealing off the garrison. In between the two belts of

defences on the frontier and at Tobruk, a distance of about sixty miles, lay a great mobile armoured camp. Large quantities of supplies had been dumped in the area, ready for the projected advance into Egypt, or to supply the forward troops if a British advance should cut, temporarily, the routes round Tobruk. The frontier defences were strong, but could be outflanked by movement through the desert. These defences stretched down into the desert from Sollum and Halfaya to Sidi Omar. Behind were other positions at Musaid, Capuzzo and Bir Ghirba, and Bardia itself was a fortress of the strongest type. All were well supplied with food, ammunition and water, so if cut off there would be no need to surrender.

The Eighth Army, as it was now called, consisted of two Corps, the 13th and the 30th. The 4th Indian Division belonged to the former together with the New Zealand Division and the 1st Army Tank Brigade. In October the Indian Division began to coalesce. There had been no opportunity for divisional training and little for brigade training. But all were confident and anxious to prove that they could achieve the same successes against the Germans as against the Italians and Vichy French.



A Bir. This is all there is to be seen. Underneath is a large cistern, cut in the solid rock by the Romans two thousand years ago. The surface water, on the rare occasions that it rains, is directed into the cistern through the hole shown

THREE

The Battle of the Omars

ON the morning of November 18, after a night of rain, a great armada of British vehicles swept across the frontier into Cyrenaica, and cruised in fleet formation to the north and north-west to find and engage the enemy. In front went a screen of tanks and armoured cars, while overhead fighters circled, waiting for the *Luftwaffe*. No opposition was encountered. It was generally believed that the rain, heavier near the coast, had bogged the panzers and kept the Stukas and Messerschmidts on the ground. Soon after crossing the frontier the sun shone out—a good omen said everyone. In the van of the advancing army went the magnificent troops of the 4th Indian Division.

The object of this offensive was to destroy all enemy forces in Cyrenaica. The bar to success was the Afrika Korps. Therefore the primary aim of the British was to seek out the enemy armour and destroy it. The plan consisted of a double thrust into enemy territory. The two Corps would both move round the enemy frontier defences, keeping deep into the desert, and would then turn northwards. The 30th Corps would drive directly on Tobruk, the garrison of which would sally out and join up with the relief. The 13th Corps, moving separately, had the task of protecting

the lines of communication of the other and isolating the frontier defences. If Rommel turned west to attack the 30th Corps, he would find the 13th Corps threatening his rear. If, on the other hand, he were to turn eastward and attempt to deal with the 13th Corps and cut the communications of the 50th Corps, the latter would join with the Tobruk garrison, obtain new lines of supply and cut Rommel off from his base at Benghazi. The British had a bare superiority in quantity of tanks, though not in quality, and were inferior in numbers of men engaged. It was felt, however, that if once the veteran British army closed with the Italians there could be but one result. But first the enemy armour had to be destroyed.

On this date only the 7th Brigade of the 4th Division was in the forward area. The 5th Brigade* was on lines of communication duty between Sidi Barrani and Matruh; it was short of vehicles and had no troop-carrying lorries. The 11th Brigade was in the coastal sector watching the Halfaya position from below. For the previous fortnight it had been staging a great bluff to give the idea that the attack would come along the coastal plain. But it also had no troop-carrying transport. With the 7th Brigade moved Division Headquarters, the Central India Horse and most of the artillery.

At dawn on the great day—D1 day in official military—the 7th Brigade clutched and moved off. All over the desert were fleets of lorries of all shapes, sizes and descriptions, camouflaged in various shades of light grey to blend with the desert. As far as the eye could see in every direction the plain was dotted with vehicles, not head to tail, but widely scattered

* In this story the 5th Brigade means the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade and should not be confused with the 5th South African or 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigades. Similarly the 7th Brigade means the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade and not the 7th British Armoured Brigade.

to avoid presenting a worth-while target to enemy aircraft. The scene has been well described by Sean Fielding.

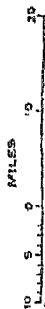
“Everywhere there are eager faces. Convoy commanders sitting up aloft their trucks like sun-burned gods—their sun-compasses pointing a black sliver of shadow towards the Boche. Despatch riders bumping incredibly through the dusty rutted tracks. Officers in groups, their maps on their knees, listening to their orders. Loricd infantry waiting, waiting, waiting. Guns, their dust covers off, marching through the infantry and off to a flank in majestic indifference.”

That night the 1st Bn. Royal Sussex Regiment reached its objective without opposition. This was at Bir ku Deheua, some ten miles north of the Omar defences, right behind the enemy. The remainder of the Brigade watched the enemy from Bir Shafferzen. Further to the north the New Zealanders had occupied Capuzzo and were pushing on towards Gamlut. All were ready for anything that might happen. As strong enemy forces were contained in the Omars, Halfaya and the intermediate positions, it seemed clear that fighting would not be long delayed.

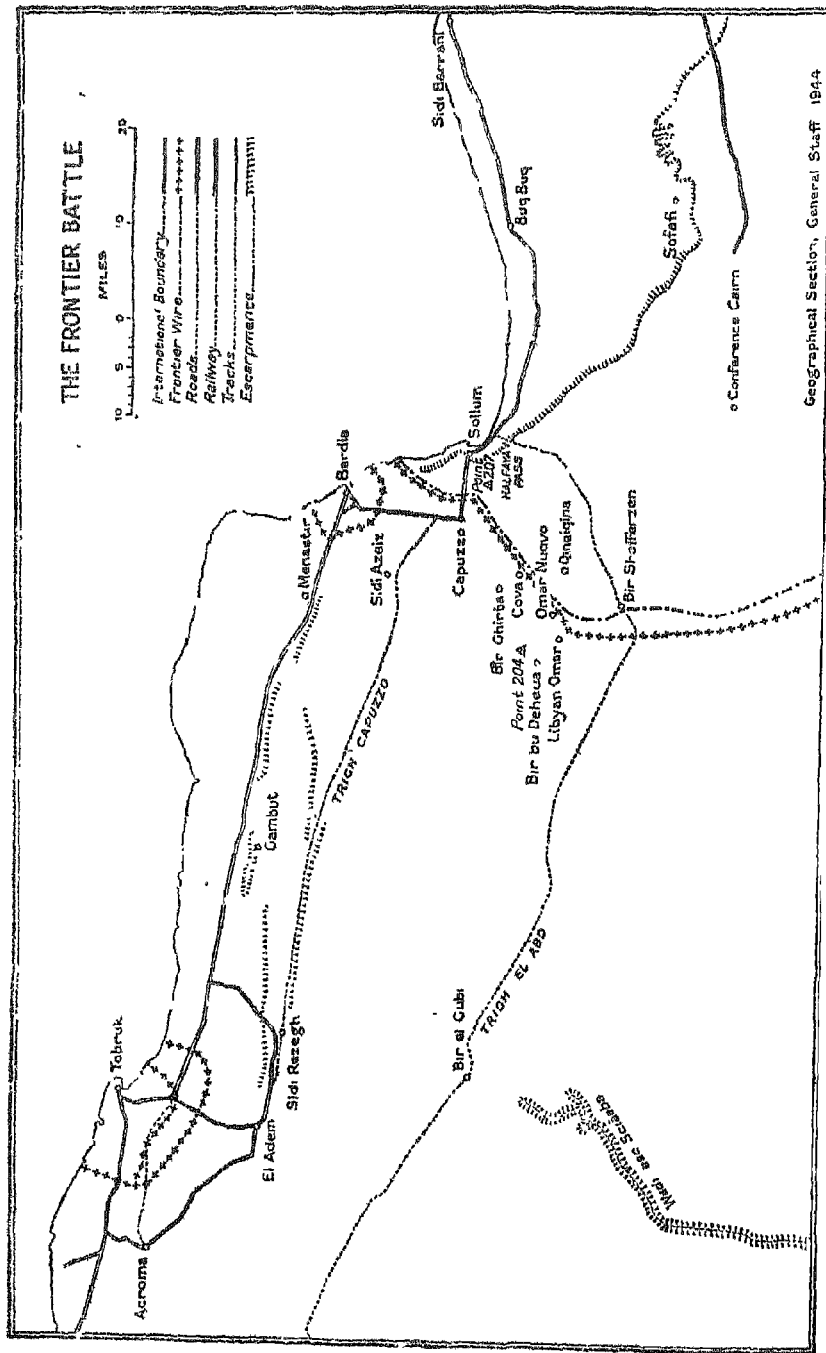
Forty miles to the west the 7th British Armoured Division was already in action against German and Italian tanks. This famous formation had reached Sidi Rezegh, within easy striking distance of the important road junction of El Adem. Something big would happen shortly. And so the 7th Brigade waited, watching and patrolling, for the Eighth Army did not wish to commit all its forces until it was seen how the battle would develop.

The desert battles that were now starting have one peculiar characteristic—it is impossible to describe the battlefield. Too often the places, whose names went round the world from the North African campaigns,

THE FRONTIER BATTLE



International Boundary
Frontier Wire
Roads
Railway
Tracks
Escarpments



Geographical Section, General Staff 1944

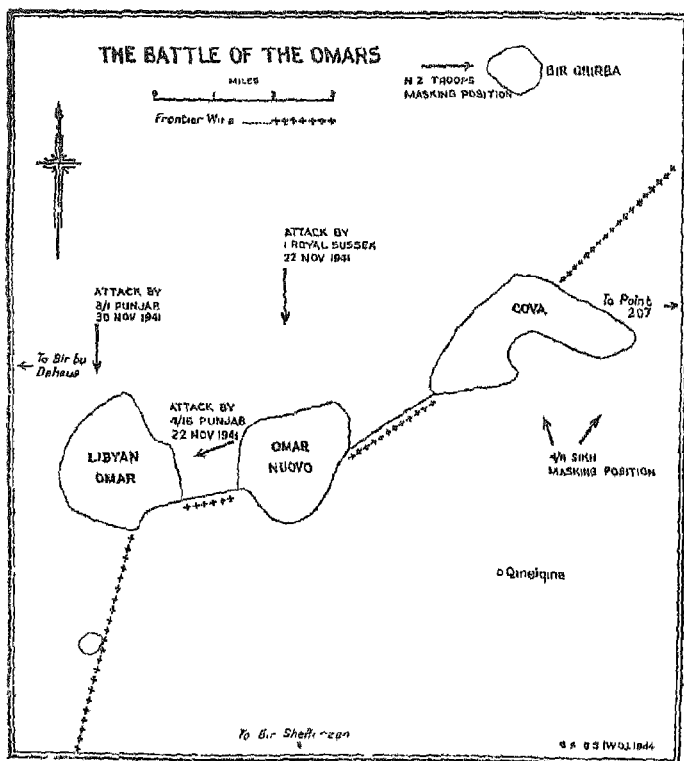
were no more than a dot on the map, shown on the ground by a name-board stuck in a tar barrel. A *bir* is a hole in the ground with a mound of earth beside it. A sheikh's tomb is a slightly smaller mound. A *qasr* is complete emptiness where rumour once placed a castle, and a *sidi* is a place where a saint once lived and left no trace. A *wadi* may be a sizeable watercourse or a dog may be able to jump across it. A *deir* is a slight depression filled with soft sand, while a *ghot* is an area of small hummocks and tufts.

On November 20 all seemed set fair in the west and so it was decided to capture the Omar defences on the frontier. This would deprive Rommel of a base for operations across the rear of the Eighth Army. The job was given to the 4th Indian Division and zero hour was ordered for noon on November 22.

The Omar defences were built on two slight humps on the Libyan plain, fifteen miles south of Capuzzo. They consisted of two defended areas, sited on the frontier wire and just over two miles apart. Seen from the south-west they appeared rather like a half-buried dumbbell.

The defences of Libyan Omar and Omar Nuovo had been very well prepared and were sited for all-round defence. The trenches were deep and flush with the ground, without parapets, which made artillery observation difficult. To the east and south, and also to the west, the perimeters were heavily mined, but the minefields had not been continued to the north. Five miles to the north-east of Omar Nuovo was another strong position, known as Cova by the Italians, and further to the north-east were others linking up with the very strong fortress of Halfaya. In rear were other defended localities, of which Bir Ghirba, some six miles due north of Omar Nuovo, was the only one in which the 4th Division was interested. Cova and the two Omars were held by the Italian Savona

Division, into which a considerable stiffening of Germans had been incorporated.



The divisional plan called for an attack by one battalion supported by artillery and tanks on Omar Nuovo from the north, followed by another attack by another battalion on Libyan Omar. A third battalion would demonstrate towards Cova and distract attention from the main assault, while part of the 5th New Zealand Brigade would mask Bir Ghirba. This audacious plan for an attack on what might be a full division by one Brigade, is eloquent of the confidence which pervaded the British forces in their advance.



General F. W. Messervy (pointing) watches the Battle of the Omars.
With him is Brigadier H. R. Briggs.

Omar Nuovo

The Royal Sussex drew Omar Nuovo as their portion and Libyan Omar was allotted to the 4th Bn. 16th Punjab Regiment. The 4th Bn. 11th Sikh Regiment was ordered to mask Cova from the south and east. During the morning of November 22 the artillery and R.A.F. had been "softening up" the positions. At noon the attack started.

The 1st and 25th Field Regiment and a battery of the 7th Medium Regiment, old friends of Sidi Barrani days, put down a concentration on Omar Nuovo, while smoke shells were dropped on Libyan Omar to blind the eyes of the enemy gunners. In front went the armoured carriers of the Royal Sussex, followed by two squadrons of "I" tanks of the 42nd Royal Tank Regiment. The battalion in lorries was only just behind. As the carriers and tanks closed in, theirs was the grim discovery that a minefield can be laid in almost no time at all. Four tanks and three carriers were blown up on ground that had been clean the day before. The attack was checked and the infantry came up to the tanks. But let Lieut.-Colonel Desmond Young, an Indian Army observer, describe the attack in his own words.

"As we crossed the desert that morning," he wrote, "we could hear the rumble and crashes as the artillery and bombers laid on. We made our long march unhindered and as we neared Omar Nuovo the attack formed up. The little carriers of the Royal Sussex led, followed by the tanks with their pennants flying. Immediately behind the tanks came the leading companies of the infantry in lorries. Behind them, Brigade Headquarters. Then came the remaining companies and behind them more tanks, lorries and carriers for the 4/16th Punjab attack, until as far as the eye could reach the plain was filled with fighting machines speeding to the attack. I had just said

'Trafalgar must have been like this' when a whizz and a crash showed the enemy to be ranging on us. On the horizon, upright black streaks marked the telescopic ladders of the enemy observers, and we had no hope of concealing ourselves on a plain as flat and bare as a billiard table. 'Here's where we're going to get a basinful,' said the veteran photographer, reaching for his tin hat and camera.

"As the shoot came down, we moved into the lee of a tank and pushed on. Lieutenant D. W. Gaylard, leading the Bren-carriers, dashed at the gap in the minefield, which a patrol had discovered the day before. But it was no longer a gap—a number of carriers and tanks were blown up immediately. A moment to reorganise his force and then without faltering he charged straight through the minefield on to the first line of trenches. The tanks followed, the infantry with them, sometimes even in front—and then we were among them.

"Thirty men, all that remained of one company, took three hundred prisoners armed with mortars, anti-tank and machine-guns. Fourteen men of another company took a further three hundred prisoners. At every step I saw gallantry beyond praise. Corporal A. Talmey, wounded several times, continued to lead his section onwards. When weakness stopped him, he gave covering fire with a Bren gun, enabling the two remaining men of his section to capture yet another post. Lieutenant C. H. Covington, hit in the knees, hobbled on until killed against a strong point, just as his men took it. Corporal Brennan, with his stretcher-bearers right up with the forward troops, picked up the wounded as soon as they fell. A gunner officer, observation over, led another section, waving his cap and cheering madly. Another corporal, badly wounded, lay under the muzzle of a silenced gun, but raised himself painfully to say 'I put that b—— out, sir, with a couple of

bombs.' No storm troops in the world could have bettered those south-countrymen.

"In the twilight of that winter evening I walked over the battlefield with Brigadier H. R. Briggs. I saw a sad number of our dead, but never one who had not fallen with his face to the enemy. Action had ceased but a sniper was paying us some attention, and a machine-gun was firing at close range. 'We must get those birds out before dark,' said the Brigadier. Two tanks were despatched to sweep the ground with infantry accompanying them. In the dusk their tracer bullets splashed red and green against the apparently deserted trenches. Then came the bright yellow crashes of grenades thrown into dug-outs by the Royal Sussex. Back came the tanks with their tails behind them—tails of two hundred more prisoners, who trudged in as night fell."

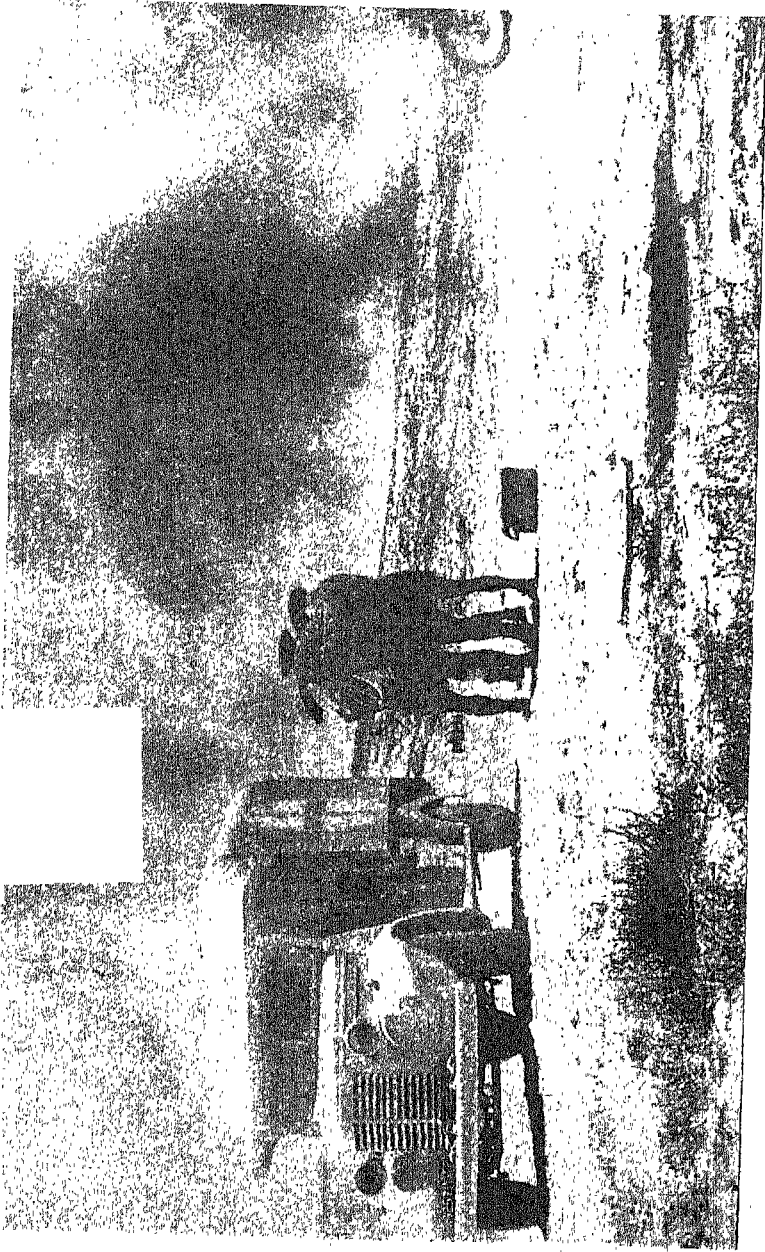
Those who have read the description of the battle in "Action at Aquila" by Hervey Allen, will remember the horrors of a dressing station during the American Civil War. However devoted and skilled the doctors might be in those days, the lack of anæsthetics, the crudity of the surgery, the ignorance of antiseptics, combined to make the hospital almost more to be dreaded than being left to die alone on the battlefield. But once the dressing station was reached, a wounded man was out of the battle; the doctors suffered no interference from enemy action.

Now all is different. Anæsthetics, blood transfusions, antiseptics and all the great knowledge of medicine and surgery is available close to the battle. A man shot through the stomach is no longer given an opiate and placed outside to die. However gravely a soldier may be wounded, he now knows that he not only has every chance of survival but also of being made as fit and well as ever before.

The Regimental Aid Post, the first place reached by a wounded man on his way back to the base, is now, however, very much part of the front line. Bullets, bombs and shells all fall near or on it, not because the enemy is trying to hit it, but because of the distance that missiles now travel.

Captain L. Bapty was Regimental Medical Officer of the Royal Sussex. He set up his aid post in the open plain near Omar Nuovo, for there was no cover anywhere, and the shorter the carry from the front line the more chance of survival there is for the wounded men. There he and his orderlies set to work to dress the wounds of the men who began to arrive, first in ones and twos and then in a quickly broadening stream. The R.A.P. was subject to continual and heavy artillery shelling from Cova and Libyan Omar, but the doctor and orderlies carried on with their work of mercy ; dressing wounds ; giving injections ; performing the urgently necessary operations ; giving out mugs of hot reviving tea ; taking down particulars ; wrapping the men up in blankets ; putting them on to ambulance cars for their long journey back towards railhead. And all the time they worked calmly and cheerfully, ignoring the death that threatened all around.

The doctors and orderlies are not the only men to whom the wounded are grateful. There are the stretcher-bearers, the men who pick up those who cannot walk and carry them back to the R.A.P. Often these men are every bit as courageous as the men fighting with bomb and bayonet. In this fight there was Lance-Corporal Fowler, with Privates Randall and Crowhurst, who were to be seen applying first field dressings right up amongst the enemy positions and scorning to lie down in spite of the withering fire. These men belonged to the Royal Sussex not to a medical unit, and they are but three of many who should be mentioned.



At the Regimental Aid Post.

The work of the men of the Royal and Indian Army Medical Corps is work not done in the heat of killing, nor in the limelight, but it is appreciated at its real value by the fighting men. The awards to the R.A.M.C. and I.A.M.C. tell a tale of calm bravery. It is worth remembering that in the vast majority of cases the recommendations for these awards were made by the infantry and gunners and not by their own officers.

Libyan Omar

At half past three that afternoon, the 4/16th Punjabis fell upon Libyan Omar in a replica of the Royal Sussex attack. This battalion had been following close behind the British battalion, and as soon as it was seen that resistance was collapsing in Omar Nuovo, Brigadier Briggs ordered the new attack to start.

In their lorries the battalion passed through Omar Nuovo itself, and were sniped at from some of the posts still holding out. With the tanks in front, the force wriggled through the minefield on the western perimeter in single file, shelled heavily but ineffectively by enemy guns in Libyan Omar. Then they extended and, under cover of an artillery bombardment, set off across the four thousand yards of bare ground to the other fortifications. In front went a squadron of tanks, followed a thousand yards in rear by another squadron and the battalion's armoured carriers. Immediately behind came the Punjabis.

The dispersed vehicles sped across the bumpy, dusty ground, roaring, swaying, rattling. In front the artillery shells were throwing up great fountains of dust and smoke. With only eight hundred yards to go, a battery of the deadly 88-mm. guns opened fire on the tanks. First one, now another, a third, a fourth, more and more of the British tanks were stopped. The second squadron turned away from the unbearable

fire, ran on a minefield and suffered heavy casualties. With machine-gun bullets cracking round them, the Punjabis leapt from the lorries and continued on foot. Only five tanks were left when they reached the first line of trenches and set to work. With nothing to keep the enemy heads down, it was cruel work. But the Punjabis filtered forward round the strong points, never allowing themselves to be pinned down by the murderous fire. Each trench and each dug-out was methodically dealt with, the main weapon being the little Italian hand-grenade, captured in huge quantities the winter before. On the left Subedar Ghulam Rasul led his company with the greatest dash, pushing ever deeper into the enemy position. All but three tanks had now been stopped, darkness was coming on and the attack was slowing down. Then night fell, lit only by the streak of tracer, the flashes of bombs and the flames from burning trucks and dumps.

The enemy position had been penetrated to a depth of two hundred yards on the north and about half a mile on the south. More than five hundred prisoners, several guns and much equipment had been taken. During the night the Punjabis consolidated the captured ground, while the enemy kept up continual harassing fire. The three tanks retired while repair parties set to work on those knocked out. In the next few days many were recovered and got to rights again.

This attack, like that of the Royal Sussex, had been a most gallant affair. Deprived of the help of the tanks in dealing with strong points, the Punjabis had yet got well into the enemy position. It was now realised that the defended area was more extensive than had previously been thought, and the enemy were well supplied with field, anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, all of which were used indiscriminately against the infantry. If the tanks had got through there can be no doubt that the whole position would have been

taken, but as it turned out Libyan Omar was to be a running sore for a whole week to come.

The Punjabis, however, had no intention of letting things remain as they were. At 4 p.m. the next day they made another effort to clear the enemy out. The whole of the Divisional Artillery opened a heavy bombardment as the infantry advanced. At the outset considerable progress was made and more than a thousand prisoners taken; but then resistance stiffened and by nightfall the attack had come to a standstill once again. The enemy were still holding out in the northern and western portions of the area, about one-third of which was now in the hands of the Punjabis.

A Gallant Little Affair

During this battle the 4/11th Sikh Regiment were staging demonstrations to distract the attention of the enemy in Cova. Some little distance south of that position the Italians had an observation post at Point 204, north-east of Qineiqina, and reconnaissance had shown it to be held by a small garrison. It was thought that the threat of the bayonet would cause the Italians to surrender—a mistake as it afterwards proved.

Two platoons under Captain Mohammed Siddiq, who had already won the Military Cross at Keren, started off across the open plain one morning in an attempt to capture the post. Two hundred yards away it was only too clear that the garrison had no intention of surrendering, and that in fact the post was much more strongly held than had been thought. Artillery from Cova, mortars, machine-guns and anti-tank guns pinned the platoons to the ground. There was a mine-field round the post and the Sikhs had no supporting fire whatsoever. Ammunition would not last all day and when it was finished the Italians would be able to pick off the prone attackers one by one, as if on a

range. It looked as if the two platoons would be wiped out.

Captain Mohammed Siddiq, lying there in the open, decided that the only way out of the difficulty was to go forward. If he and his men had got to die, how much better to die trying to kill the enemy rather than lying waiting for the end. It is, however, one thing to decide to go on ; another to collect your men, scattered and under intense fire, get them on their feet and start forward. It can only be done by brave and trusted leaders of determined men. Two havildars and a naik,* with Mohammed Siddiq, moved round encouraging the men, and then these four " bahadurs " leapt up and started across those two hundred yards of bare plain, followed by all their men. With a roar of "*Wah Guru ji ki Fateh*" (To God the glory and victory) they swept up to the position and within five minutes all was over. The brave Naik Chanan Singh accounted for two heavy machine-guns before a burst from a third at point blank range killed him. The Sikhs captured a Breda gun and five heavy machine-guns, with several mortars and light machine-guns, and accounted for twenty-five of the enemy. The forlorn hope had succeeded.

Reconnaissance by the Sikhs had shown Cova to be strongly held and well supplied with artillery. Furthermore, in Libyan Omar the Punjabis had suffered many casualties. It was clear that reinforcements would be required to complete the operation. General Messerly therefore sent for the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade.

This Brigade, concentrating its forces with the utmost speed from a wide dispersal on the lines of

* The ranks in the Indian infantry and the majority of other corps in the Indian Army are :—

Sergeant	= Havildar.
Corporal	= Naik.
Lance-Corporal	= Lance-Naik.
Private	= Sepoy.

communication, was attached to the 1st South African Division. On the very day that orders for it to come forward were received, other orders reached it. The battle need seemed greater. Leaving the remainder of his Brigade to follow as soon as mustered, Brigadier Russell "marched to the sound of the guns" with the 3rd Bn. 1st Punjab Regiment, his first battalion to assemble.

FOUR

Clearing the Frontier

BEFORE the 5th Brigade could come into action, the Eighth Army had sustained a serious reverse. November 23 and 24 had been black days in the west. At dusk on the 23rd a heavy force of German tanks overran the 5th South African Brigade and destroyed it. Next morning the 7th British Armoured Division engaged this force and suffered bloody loss. Rommel was surrounded, but had no intention of trying to break out.

On November 23 he detached a strong force of tanks and supporting troops to strike eastward against the forces on the frontier and particularly against the supply columns of the 30th Corps. The world Press inaccurately described this move as a raid on Egypt. It was no raid but a counter-stroke—sound tactical employment of the advantage of the inside position. But the success of this move depended to a large extent on the possession of the frontier defences, of which the most important sector was now in the hands of the 4th Indian Division.

Early on the morning of November 24 it became apparent to the Indian Division in the Omar area that ominous events had occurred in the west. Survivors from the 5th South African Brigade began to arrive

with harrowing tales of the action at Sidi Rezegh. As the day passed, intercepts from armoured car patrols showed enemy panzer forces to be approaching both from north and west. An increasing number of trucks and lorries began to pass the Omars in an easterly direction. Headquarters of the 30th Corps also passed through and it was disclosed that, owing to the German tank advance, soft-skinned vehicles were being withdrawn. Throughout the day groups of British aircraft seemed unable to differentiate between pursued and pursuer. Night fell upon a scene of confusion; but darkness, strangely enough, threw light upon the situation. The unmistakable leaguer flares of the enemy began to soar on all sides and to watchers at Division Headquarters at Bir Shefferzen it was apparent that the Germans practically surrounded them. In fact one column had passed less than a mile to the south and had captured the main dressing station of the 17th Indian Field Ambulance. During the night Headquarters for safety moved into Omar Nuovo, tiptoeing right through the enemy leaguers.

The "B" Echelon* vehicles of the 7th Brigade were waiting south of the Omars for orders to rejoin their units. Around them during the day a confusion of vehicles was pouring eastward, and just before dark tanks were seen also. The "B" Echelon had no intention of retiring; if they did so the fighting men would certainly go short of water and probably of food. They leaguered in closer formation and stayed put until the morning, when they moved in perfect formation to join the Brigade. During the night panzers nosed around the leaguer, but retired hastily on seeing the dark and doubtful mass; little did they

* In a fighting unit the vehicles are divided into two echelons for ease of administration. "A" Echelon contains all the vehicles required for fighting such as armoured carriers, platoon trucks and gun tractors. "B" Echelon contains all administrative vehicles such as cooks' lorries, water trucks and anti-gas stores, and they are frequently 'brigaded' under the Brigade Transport Officer.

know that the heaviest weapon to face them was an anti-tank rifle.

Five tanks of the 42nd Royal Tank Regiment were being repaired just south of Bir Shefferzen. All through the night the crews worked on their tanks, getting them ready for battle again. Next day they sent off all their administrative lorries to safety and then set out to do battle with the vastly superior enemy. In this gallant and desperate action, they destroyed three panzers before they were themselves all knocked out.

It was essential to defer the mopping up of Libyan Omar and prepare defences against the enemy counter-stroke. Omar Nuovo, although shelled from Cova, provided a base. The Central India Horse and a battery of the 31st Field Regiment were sent to guard the supply dumps on the frontier wire and to prevent the enemy from re-fuelling from them. The 4/11th Sikhs and the 1st Field Regiment were still outside the defences in the morning, on the open plain to the east.

When morning broke it was known that there were strong enemy forces in the vicinity. One force had entered Halfaya, before turning south-east along the line of the escarpment, and the other was south of the Omars near the frontier wire.

Tank Versus Field Gun

As the sun was rising on the morning of November 25, the 4/11th Sikhs and the 1st Field Regiment were near Qineiqina, together with a column of New Zealand transport, when an armoured car came in with the news that about twenty-five tanks were approaching from the south. About an hour and a half later the tanks appeared in front of the Field Regiment, who moved into action covering the infantry

and transport. There was no time to dig gun positions and there was no cover except slit trenches, dug in case of air attack.

There were twenty-eight tanks advancing from the south, three thousand yards away. They consisted of the heavy Mark III and Mark IV types, arrayed in lines of four or five abreast, with thirty yards between tanks and seventy yards between ranks. Their disposition was such that all tanks were able to shoot without masking each other. At two thousand yards they opened fire upon the field guns, halting to fire their cannon and maintaining machine-gun fire while in movement.

As they came nearer their fire became accurate, but the 25-pounders remained silent, the men lying beside the guns. The brunt was borne by the 52nd Battery, which held the western flank of the position. The Battery waited stoically until the tanks were only eight hundred yards away, and then the men leapt to their feet and opened fire. The gunners worked feverishly under the hail of bullets and shells. Men fell fast, but the guns were still served. The tanks surged onward to within five hundred yards. There they halted. For ten minutes an intense slogging match—tank against gun, toe to toe—ensued. It was too much for the Germans, who scrambled off to the west to a hull-down position,* and continued the fire fight. After a further ten minutes of terrific hammering on the guns in the open, the panzers charged 52nd Battery head on. Half the artillerymen were strewn round their guns and limbers, but their comrades never wavered, smashing back shot for shot. At three hundred yards the tanks had had enough. They wheeled and withdrew to the south-east heavily shelled by the 11th Battery,

*A hull-down position is where only the turret and gun of the tank is visible to the opponent, thus presenting the smallest target possible.

which until then had been able to take but a small part in the action.

The 52nd Battery had sustained forty-two casualties in forty-five minutes. The 1st Field Regiment in all had eighteen killed and forty-four wounded. Seven tanks were destroyed and a troop of South African anti-tank guns hurried up and finished off another, which was hobbling away damaged. Five of the guns were knocked out but the damage was only slight and they were soon repaired. This very gallant action had saved the Sikhs and the large amount of transport, which would undoubtedly otherwise have been overrun. The Germans had learned that even if adversely situated and without time to dig in, British gunners were quite competent to cope with armour.

The morning lesson had been stiff but it was not enough for the stubborn enemy. That afternoon a further twenty-eight tanks came with a rumble and a cloud of dust out of the desert to the south-east and approached Omar Nuovo. The watchers in that position were puzzled by the sight of German tanks advancing on their own minefield. To attack artillery dug in and sited behind a minefield bespoke recklessness bordering on stupidity. The tanks opened fire at four thousand yards and, receiving no reply, continued to close.

The troops in Omar Nuovo climbed on top of their vehicles and, like spectators at a race meeting, waited for the event. On came the tanks in the same formation as the morning and the audience, much too interested to take cover, held their breath as the first tanks topped a low rise eight hundred yards away. The artillery commander sprang up giving the signal to fire, and the first salvo from the 25-pounders crashed over. Cheers rang out madly as salvo followed salvo. Gunners of the 25th Field Regiment worked like fiends, and tanks were seen to reel sideways and burst into flames.



Five blazing wicks remain

The enemy formation scattered and turned west along the perimeter of the minefield in frantic haste to escape. Five blazing wrecks remained. For fifteen minutes all the artillery in the Omars had a field day. Even the guns of the 7th Medium Regiment joined in. The desert rocked with crashes, and the whole front was blotted out in clouds of dust and smoke. Six more tanks went up in flames as they fled. Many others scuttled out of range heavily damaged.

That evening men of the 4th Field Company, Bengal Sappers and Miners, went out and finished off all the derelicts. No chance of recovery was being left for the Germans. A tank stopped is not necessarily a tank destroyed, and so after an action it is the job of the Sappers to complete the work of gun and mine.

Later in the day the 4/16th Punjabis reported that more than a dozen tanks were advancing inside Libyan Omar, having come in through a gap in the minefield on the western side. They were probably the remnants of the party that had attacked the 1st Field Regiment early in the day. Suledar Ghulam Rasul, M.C., directed the artillery defensive fire and the attack was halted. Major R. B. Scott, with a small mobile column of the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles, had also destroyed a tank further east. It had been a good day.

During the day the gunners of the 4th Indian Division had dealt a very severe blow at Rommel's eastern counter-stroke. Twenty panzers had been utterly destroyed and a large number had only managed to totter out of battle. The Germans had learned that British artillery could wait for their targets, even under the heaviest punishment. Infantry or transport protected by such gunners would never be butcher's meat for the panzers.

The Panzers Retire

If the intention of the Axis tank sally to the east was to regain the Omars as a fortress athwart the

British lines of communication, the plan had failed. Next morning the German columns were gone, though there were still small forces roaming about east of the frontier. Reports began to arrive at Division Headquarters from units which had been scooped up by the invaders and released twenty-four hours later—prisoners for a day. The story of the 17th Indian Field Ambulance* is typical of a number of similar adventures.

On the evening of November 24, the Main Dressing Station of the Field Ambulance was stationed south of Bir Shefferzen. At the time there were not many cases present—only a dozen men who had been operated on and were not yet strong enough to stand the long bumpy drive back to the casualty clearing station. The dressing station had had a busy time earlier in the day, treating British, Indian and Axis wounded, but nearly all had been evacuated. When a man is wounded doctors do not recognise any difference between friend and foe; the treatment is just the same.

There had been much movement of transport during the afternoon all around, but the staff of the Field Ambulance took no notice and carried on with its work. Just after dark a German light tank and armoured car, with several lorries, rumbled out of the night and the doctors and staff found themselves prisoners. The personnel were rounded up and searched and an Italian doctor, who had been a prisoner, was placed in charge. The dressing station continued to function as before, although the Germans removed much of the medical stores for their own use.

In the middle of the night a British gunner officer walked into the surgical ward and asked anxiously, "Can you tell me where I am?"

*A Field Ambulance is a medical unit forming part of a Division. It can be split up into advanced and main dressing stations. What is usually called an Ambulance in civil life is known as an Ambulance Car in the army.

"At Boundary Post 57 on the Libyan border," replied Major Aird, who was operating. "It is in enemy hands and we are prisoners of war. The guard happens to have stepped outside for the moment."

"How very embarrassing," said the gunner. "I don't think I should linger," and was gone before he was detected.

Next morning the desert was aflame on all sides. The first fleet of panzers advancing on the Omars lumbered straight through the ambulance lines. As the battle was joined, armour-piercing shells whizzed overhead or ricocheted across the plain. Later in the day the German tank forces retreated past the ambulance again, showing many signs of having encountered heavy weather. British bombers followed them with salvo after salvo of heavy bombs.

Colonel von Stephan, commander of the 5th German Panzer Regiment, had been mortally wounded in the engagement with the 1st Field Regiment, and was brought in for treatment. The Germans and Italians watched the operation with interest, and commented favourably on the equipment of the hospital, which they said was better than their own. In the evening a German officer, speaking excellent English, called and collected the Colonel's effects. Early next morning British patrols, which had been milling round during the hours of darkness, arrived in strength. The guards had cleared out and the 17th Field Ambulance, as free men, packed up and moved back to Conference Cairn to re-equip.

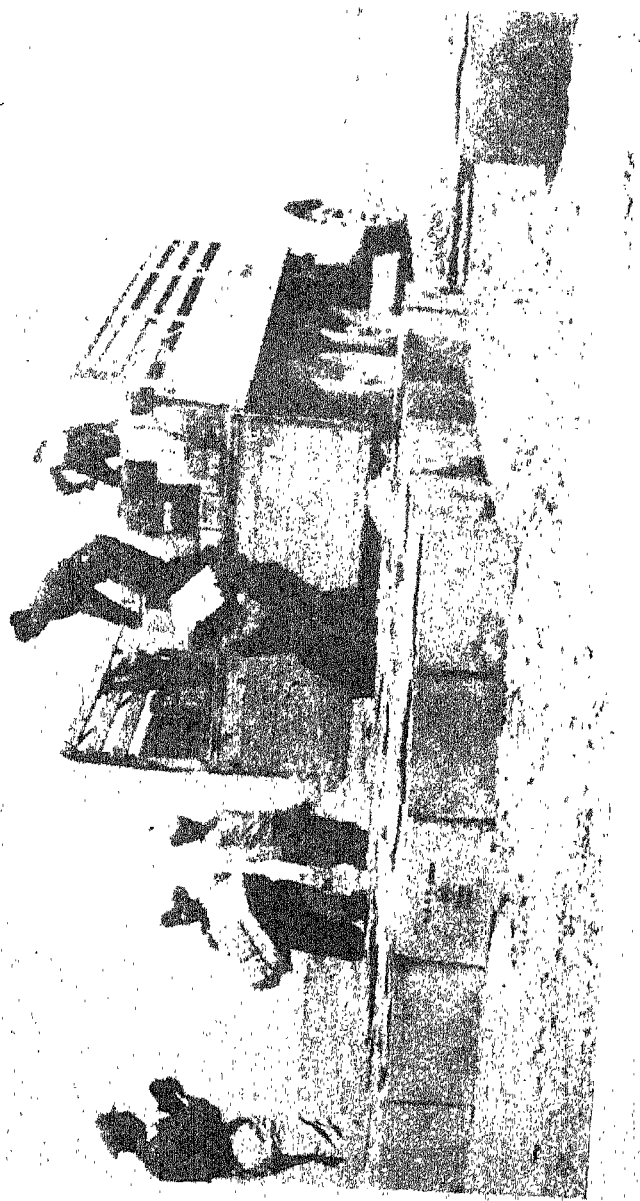
The Initiative Regained

With his counter-attack at Sidi Rezegh and the foray across the frontier, Rommel had attempted to seize the initiative. The frontier and Sidi Rezegh fighting had been expensive to the British forces and General Auchinleck arrived to survey the situation. He

commanded an immediate resumption of the offensive. The New Zealanders were first on the move. Disregarding the actions of the panzer columns in the frontier area, the Kiwi Division, less its own 5th Brigade, continued to advance westward through the rough country near the coast. It beat off all counter-attacks, joined up with the 30th Corps and had such an effect on the Axis rear areas that Rommel was forced to conform with the British plan and pull back his tanks from the east. The initiative was regained and the British forces maintained their original object of linking up with Tobruk and establishing themselves across the enemy's lines of communication. It is a classic example of "maintenance of the objective," one of the principles of war.

The 4th Division was now concentrating. The 5th Brigade was on its way up and the 11th Brigade was on the move also. Petrol, food and water began to come through once more. The supply columns had had to run for shelter when the tanks arrived, but as soon as possible they made their way forward, even though the desert was not free of the enemy. As through all the campaign, the drivers of the R.I.A.S.C. worked devotedly, and it was due to their untiring work and determination to get supplies through to the fighting men that the 4th Indian Division was able to win its many battles.

November 26 was spent in reorganisation, interrupted by some shelling from Cova. Next day, just before dawn, the 4/16th Punjab Regiment made another effort to finish off Libyan Omar. After a heavy artillery concentration for ten minutes, the infantry climbed from their trenches and advanced. Two hundred yards were made in the first rush, but then the enemy opened up intense fire. Tracer of all colours lit up the area. The troops pushed onward, a company of the 4/11th Sikhs assisting, but shortly after dawn



A lorry load of petrol arrives.

the attack was stopped once again. The whole line had advanced about three hundred yards ; some guns and men had been captured, but the enemy were still resisting with the utmost determination. By now about half the area was in the hands of the Punjabis, but the northern and western sectors were still holding out. Tanks also sometimes appeared in the enemy lines, coming in through the west face. During this day one advanced on Battalion Headquarters, but was destroyed by one of the Punjabis' anti-tank guns.

During these days the Division assumed responsibility for the 5th New Zealand Brigade, which had been overrun and was reorganising at Capuzzo. The New Zealand Division were old friends. In 1940 they had assisted in the construction of the Baqqush "box," and some of them had driven the lorries carrying the 5th Indian Brigade into action at Sidi Barrani, afterwards accompanying them with the bayonet. On November 29 a convoy was escorted into Capuzzo where these New Zealanders were very short of supplies. On return the Indian officer in charge told of the pleasure of the hard-pressed Kiwis, when the first lorries to arrive unloaded petrol, and the second brought much needed water. But when still more three-tonners were found to be stocked with bread and even a rum ration, gratitude was unbounded and the Indians and New Zealanders rejoiced together.

The End of the Omars

It was decided to make an end of Libyan Omar, which now consisted of an area approximately 2,000 yards by 1,000 yards. To do this the 3rd Bn. 1st Punjab Regiment of the 5th Brigade was brought up. This battalion had gained a great name for dash and courage in Syria, where it had suffered very heavily. To assist the attack, the 4/16th Punjabis were ordered to occupy the enemy's attention on the opposite side of the position.

The 3/1st Punjabis advanced from the north at 5.15 a.m. and passed through the minefield in the dark. Unfortunately, fire was opened prematurely, just as the enemy's forward defences were reached. A sheet of steel swept the approaches. Both commanders of the leading companies were killed and men fell fast. Direction was lost in the darkness and, although some ground was gained and a number of prisoners taken, at dawn the attack was stopped. Subedar Fatteh Singh made desperate efforts to get his company forward, walking about calmly in the open and encouraging his Rajputs until, after being twice wounded, he fell riddled with bullets.

The sun rose on a confused scene. The majority of the infantry were lying in the open. Companies were intermingled and all unable to advance. Some of the 3/1st Punjabis had penetrated deep into the enemy position, including one party which had gone right through to the rear. The uncertainty of the position of these parties made artillery support impossible.

At 11 a.m. the 4/16th Punjabis started to infiltrate. Without artillery help and with the enemy fighting every inch of the way, it was terribly slow work, but the battalion gained some ground, especially in the north. By 3 p.m. it was clear that the whole position would not be taken before dark unless more help were made available. Three tanks were sent to assist and at 4 p.m. they advanced together with eight carriers of the 4/16th and three of the 3/1st Punjabis.

Lieut.-Colonel Desmond Young was also watching this attack, this time from a captured observation post some four hundred yards behind the forward troops. This is his description of what happened.

"There was no discernible movement, except for three of our tanks milling round, firing their guns at positions I could not locate. Three carriers of the 3/1st Punjabis boldly entered the area, only to go up

in flames within four hundred yards of me. It was not easy to see much owing to the dust, and also because the enemy machine-guns were paying the post an unpleasant amount of attention.

"This continued for an hour or so until it was decided to try to rescue one of our tanks, which had gone through a dug-out with one of its tracks but was still in action. For this purpose a smoke screen was put down by another tank, which then went in to tow the foundered one out. Soon after the smoke was released, I fancied that I saw some figures moving about amongst it, but it was impossible to tell whether they were our men or the enemy.

"Had I but known it, I was watching a particularly gallant and daring attack led by Captain J. A. Robertson, M.C., of the 3/1st Punjabis. The previous night he had pushed in with his company through the minefield, with a determination which recalled the capture of Kissoué outside Damascus by the same battalion. After contacting two other companies, the commanders of which had been killed, he thrust forward patrols in the face of strong opposition. All day he and his men had been pinned to the ground by heavy and continuous machine-gun fire from all sides. It says much for him, that at 5.30 p.m. after so dangerous and exhausting a day and night he still had the energy and grasp of opportunity to lead his men forward as soon as he saw the smoke go down. The result was that one of the strong points, which had been holding him up all day, was rushed and captured.

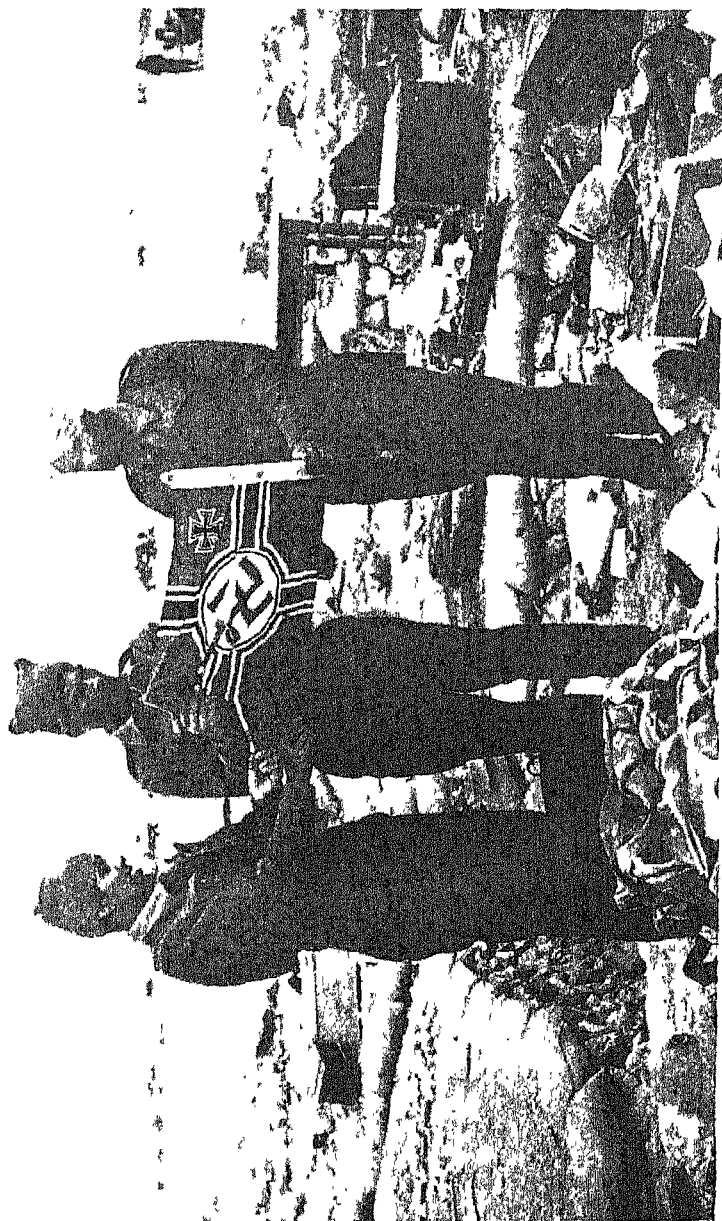
"Comparable in courage with this feat was that of a wounded sepoy, Sepoy Mohammed Ayub Khan, who insisted on crawling after his company despite his wounds. He saw his comrades held up by an enemy machine-gun post, crawled painfully up to it and blasted the foe out with hand grenades. He was killed attacking another post.

"Another officer of the Punjabis was carrying ammunition across the open although wounded in the leg. Lance-Naik Ujagar Singh penetrated deep into the enemy position, although wounded in arm and face, and led attack after attack with grenades taken from wounded and dead comrades. It was a most gallant affair."

By nightfall the end was in sight. Many prisoners had been taken and there only remained about a hundred Germans holding out. Plans were made to overrun the position on the morrow. When morning came the enemy had gone. They had crept through the minefield and were loose in the desert. Armoured cars went after them and they were all brought in.

Among the last captures was a rescue—a British gunner major, who had been captured on the first day. He had spent the entire siege with the garrison of Libyan Omar. He said that the terrific punishment meted out by the artillery would have secured surrender a week before, but for the cold impersonal courage and magnificent leadership of the regular German officer in command. This officer, named Schoen, treated his British prisoner as his guest, whenever possible inviting him to share his meagre meal. Towards the Italians Schoen was brutal, shooting them if they attempted to give themselves up and using them as a screen for the movements of the German personnel. The Italians feared him even more than they did the British and so his courageous leadership enabled the position to be held for a week longer. Schoen said that he had been ordered by Rommel to hold the position to the last man and the last round, and he carried out his orders.

The capture of Libyan Omar had cost the 4/16th Punjabis two hundred and fifteen officers and men killed and wounded during their eight-day battle. On the one day that they were engaged the 3/1st Punjabis had lost one hundred and five, while the 4/11th Sikhs'



A trophy from Libyan Omar

casualties were thirty-six. But this cost was small compared with what the enemy had suffered. The entire garrison of Libyan Omar had been either killed or captured, a total of just on three thousand.

Action at Sidi Azeiz

On December 1 the 5th Indian Brigade relieved the 5th New Zealand Brigade, blocking the escape holes at Capuzzo, Musaid and Sollum. West of these places a mobile column, consisting of the Central India Horse, a battery of the 31st Field Regiment and a troop of the 65th Anti-tank Regiment, was operating against roving columns of the enemy.

The C.I.H. on the morning of December 3 were scattered in a wide screen across the Trigh Capuzzo some twelve miles west of Sidi Azeiz. Regimental Headquarters was on the Trigh itself, when an armoured car patrol was spotted some two miles ahead. This might be enemy or it might be a party of the 11th Hussars, the original "desert rats," operating with the 7th Armoured Division. The C.I.H. sent their armoured car forward to investigate.

The watchers at Headquarters saw the car halt at the top of the slight rise ahead. Then they saw the patrol start to come forward. Next, the C.I.H. car turned round and raced back over the bumpy ground. Within a minute eight tanks appeared over the rise and opened fire. The C.I.H. slipped swiftly back into dead ground, where they were joined by their armoured car. They were lucky to have it. It had been penetrated by a shell, which by some freak of fortune had failed to explode.

Meanwhile the enemy were coming on at speed. The going was very bad for trucks, but Colonel Goulder, the column commander, told the cavalry on the wireless to decoy the tanks on to his guns. Off went the trucks, ploughing through the dustiest places, to

provide a smoke screen against the bullets and shells which pursued them.

Behind each rise the C.I.H. halted in order to see what was happening and to encourage the enemy to further pursuit. The panzers lumbered on their trail. Following behind the tanks could now be seen between two hundred and three hundred vehicles, presumably bringing infantry and guns. Finally after a chase of just on twelve miles, the C.I.H. topped a rise and there beyond them were the guns in position. The trucks swept to the flanks and the enemy tanks came over the skyline. With a crash the 25-pounders opened. Within a minute four tanks were blazing masses of scrap metal and the rest had scuttled away to safety. The 31st Field lifted on to the infantry and soon many of the lorries were damaged. The Germans then threw in an infantry attack, but were blown back. Soon the whole force was in retreat.

It had been a most successful little engagement. Much the same had happened to the north. There, two other squadrons of the Central India Horse had decoyed about three hundred lorries and tanks on to the guns and infantry of the 5th New Zealand Brigade. The Maoris held their fire and slaughtered the Germans before they could dismount.

Next day the same sort of action occurred on the Trigh Capuzzo. This time there were twenty panzers, but they were far more cautious. The gunners held their fire but the tanks would not close. All through the day this considerable force dithered about in front of the little Goldforce, and by evening had retired, leaving a hundred dead Germans and a hundred prisoners behind. The enemy had learned his lesson and now had a wholesome respect for British field guns.

This engagement was the last serious contact with the enemy in the frontier area. The bolt holes of Bardia and Halfaya were solidly blocked and the 2nd South

African Division moved up to watch them. The New Zealand Division had joined up with the 30th Corps and was helping to secure the corridor into Tobruk which had now been opened. A new phase in the operations was now starting. The Axis had formed a defence line running south from the perimeter of the fortress to El Adem and Bir El Gubi, and the Eighth Army had completed the first stage of its task. Contact had been established with Tobruk. The frontier garrisons had been isolated and, provided they were not relieved by a counter-stroke, could be reduced by bombing, shelling, starvation and thirst. The next stage was the destruction of the remainder of the Afrika Korps, roaming about the front, and the Italian Divisions in the defences at El Gubi, El Adem and round Tobruk.

The 4th Indian Division's first operation in the campaign was over. It had played a worthy role. The dash of the infantry, the staunchness of the gunners, the devotion of the supply services, all had contributed to victory. The cost had not been unduly high. Thirty-nine British and Indian officers, two hundred and thirty-two British other ranks and three hundred and forty-five Indian other ranks were killed, wounded and missing in the Battle of the Omars.

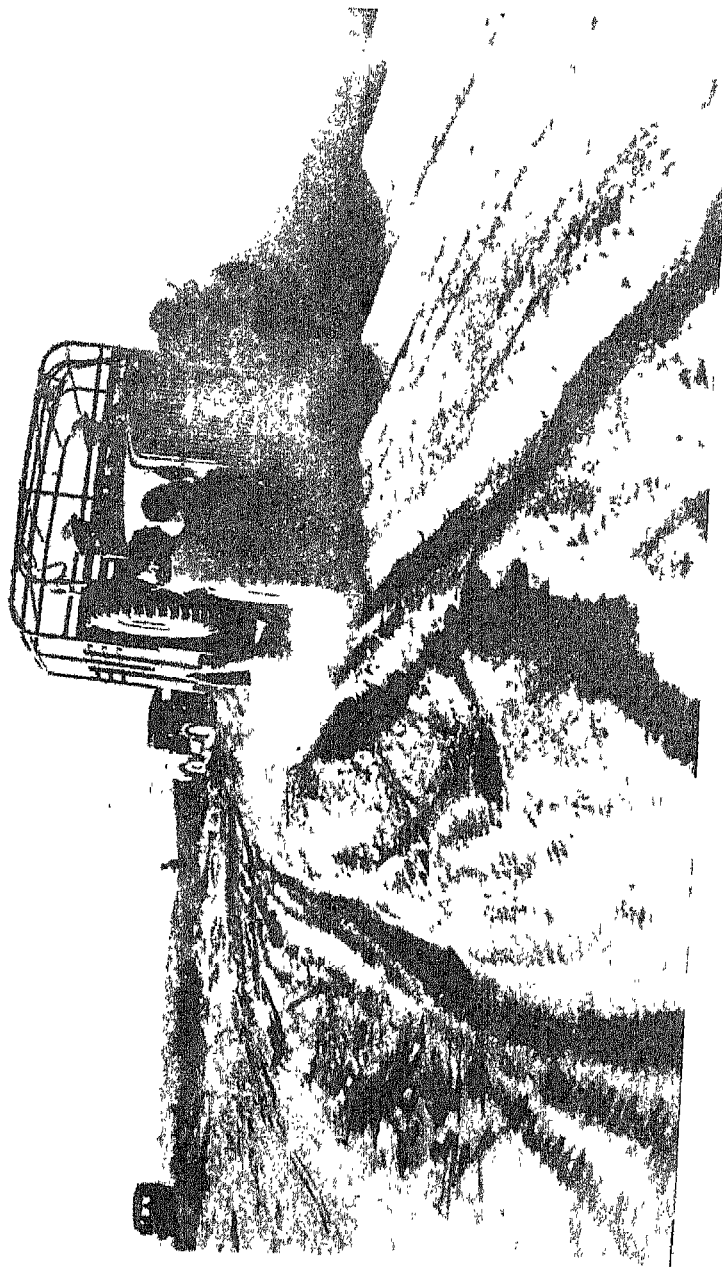
The 7th Brigade had carried the main burden so far. The turn of the others was now to come. On the morning of December 4, command on the frontier was handed over to the South Africans. Advanced Headquarters of the Division moved thirty miles west of the Omars, to the south of El Gubi, to prepare for the new battle.

FIVE

Advance Into Libya

THE story now tells of the doings of the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade and an action deep in the desert, some thirty-five miles south of Tobruk. Between the Omars and Bir el Gubi the country is flat with no escarpments worthy of the name. Although the ground appears to be quite level there is, in fact, much dead ground. Two forces can pass within a couple of miles and not see each other, hidden in the slight folds. Yet if a man were to stand on top of a high lorry, the whole of the other column might be clearly visible. The area is almost incredibly dusty. Across it runs the Trigh el Abd (the Road of Slaves), one of the most ancient desert trails. At the beginning of the desert war the Trigh was marked only by low cairns, but constant use had made it deeply rutted and in places more than a mile wide. Movement is, of course, not confined to tracks but a moving lorry always carries its plume of dust behind it, and this makes movement of large forces almost impossible to conceal.

Bir el Gubi was one of the places in which Graziani's army had concentrated before its advance into Egypt in September 1940. Trenches had been dug and the whole area made into a defended camp—defended against the audacious raids of the 7th Armoured Division. Since then more than a year of



Road of Slaves

dust-storms had done much to obliterate the defences, but once a trench is dug in the underlying rock it is always there, even if it is silted up.

The Axis had no solid defence line as on the frontier, the positions at El Gubi and El Adem acting as bastions of a fluid line, behind, in front of and through which the mobile forces roamed. Little was known about the position and the air photographs taken failed to come out. The 11th Brigade, now under the command of the 7th Armoured but not of the 4th Division, was given the difficult task of clearing this area.

That afternoon orders arrived for an attack on El Gubi next day. The attack was to be from the west, that is to say, from behind the enemy, and a variety of units were placed under Brigadier Anderson's command. If serious opposition were encountered, the artillery support would be very small, but it was thought that the enemy would not put up much fight. It was, however, going to be a most difficult operation, beginning with an approach march of forty-seven miles, by night, over unreconnoitred country.

The navigating officer of the Brigade, Captain Robertson, Brigade Intelligence Officer, a Cameron Highlander, had only forty-five minutes of daylight in which to make all arrangements. The column started off due west and, after passing right round El Gubi, ended up facing due east. The march was completed in six hours, an exceptionally fine piece of leading on a bitterly cold night. It also speaks well for the efficiency of the Brigade, which had had very little opportunity for mobile training during the summer.

The attack could not start until after sunrise, for the infantry had to have time to recognise their objectives. There were reported to be two strong points facing the Brigade. One was at Point 174, but

was believed to be weakly held, while the other was Point 182.

The Fight At El Gubi

At 7 a. n. on December 4 the artillery opened fire and ten minutes later the infantry and Valentine tanks advanced. On the right, heading for Point 174, went the 2nd Bn. Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders with three tanks. On the left was the 2nd Bn. 5th Mahratta Light Infantry with nine tanks, this battalion being given the bulk of the armour as Point 182 was believed to be held in strength. Almost as soon as the artillery bombardment began, large numbers of enemy transport were seen withdrawing to the north. It was not possible to switch the guns onto this wonderful target, for there was no communication with the gunners. They were firing from the south of El Gubi several miles away, but the 18-pounder anti-tank guns had the delight of becoming field-guns for a brief shoot. They opened up at five thousand yards, a number of hits were scored before the lorries disappeared into the dust and were gone.

Opposition in front of the Mahrattas was weak and they drove up to within a few yards of the position before going in with the bayonet. About two hundred and fifty Italians were captured, together with a large number of lorries. A dump, containing 50,000 gallons of petrol and oil, and a hospital were also taken. As soon as the position was safely in their hands, one of the companies of the Mahrattas wheeled to the right to come to the help of the Camerons. The company was led forward with great dash, but came under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. Captain Palande was killed at the head of his men and the attack was held up.

In the meantime the Cameron Highlanders had come up against very strong opposition, and it became clear that the centre of resistance was facing this

battalion instead of the Mahrattas. The Camerons had got out of their lorries on the start line and fought their way forward on foot, suffering very heavy casualties. Individual Jocks tried to crawl on forward, but the machine-gun fire from the front and flanks made it impossible. The battalion was pinned in the open desert. It was a nasty position.

Away to the north was the 4th Armoured Brigade providing protection against the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions which were known to be near. The next attack began at 3 p.m., when two companies of the Camerons attacked from the south and two companies of the Mahrattas came in from the north. With the Indian battalion went seven armoured carriers. Five of these were knocked out almost at once. Havildar Major Baji Nalaode's carrier was one of those set on fire by a mortar bomb. With his vehicle aflame he and his driver continued forward. When the heat became too great they leapt out with the Bren-gun and ammunition, and carried on firing from the ground until out of ammunition.

The Camerons and Mahrattas were finally held up four hundred yards from the enemy position. The artillery bombardments had done little damage. The enemy defences consisted of deep, narrow weapon-pits, against which only a direct hit was of any value. It had been an attack of the very finest order, across completely open country, with little tank or artillery support. Casualties were heavy, particularly among the officers of the Camerons.

It was decided to resume the attack at dawn next day, December 5. If strong resistance was met a green verrey light would be fired and the attack would not be pressed home.

At 6 a.m. one company each of the Camerons and the Mahrattas set out in a "silent" attack. Strong opposition was encountered and the companies were

withdrawn. One Mahratta platoon did not see the very lights and pushed on with the greatest determination to within two hundred yards of a post containing six machine-guns. The platoon was then recalled by runner, but Naik Samullah Khan and his section were in such close contact that no runner could reach them. In the first cold light of that winter dawn, the naik led his section in a furious charge right into the enemy post and captured it. That afternoon they suffered from the bombardment supporting the Rajputana Rifles' attack, but were safely brought back after dark, having destroyed the captured guns.

At 12.30 p.m. that afternoon, two companies of the 1st Bn. 6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's) attached from the south, preceded by an artillery smoke screen and four tanks, with the right company of the Camerons assisting. At first good progress was made but the few tanks, with whom there was no wireless communication, were insufficient to deal with the enemy's defences. Another Raj Rif company was put in further round the flank, but still the enemy fire was galling in the extreme. Lieut.-Colonel A. G. Butler and another officer were killed by a mortar bomb and Wellesley's had another commanding officer.

In the meantime a very large dump of ammunition, petrol, diesel oil and food had been located half a dozen miles away to the north-west, and the 12th Madras Field Company with some sappers of the Armoured Division were sent to destroy it. In the desert a dump is not a huge pile of stores. That would be asking for trouble from hostile air attacks. The stores are scattered over a large area, and sometimes placed in pits and covered with earth. It is therefore possible to drive over a dump and be none the wiser. In time to come dumps may be discovered in the desert and historians will puzzle over these curious caches. Throughout these days the Sappers were



“The blazing petrol was a magnificent sight.”

busy working on the stores and the blazing petrol and ammunition was a magnificent sight. During the work enemy tanks came in to re-fuel. The Sappers withdrew and continued the work of destruction afterwards. There can be no doubt that the loss of this huge dump had a great effect on the battle and was a primary cause of the Axis retreat to the west.

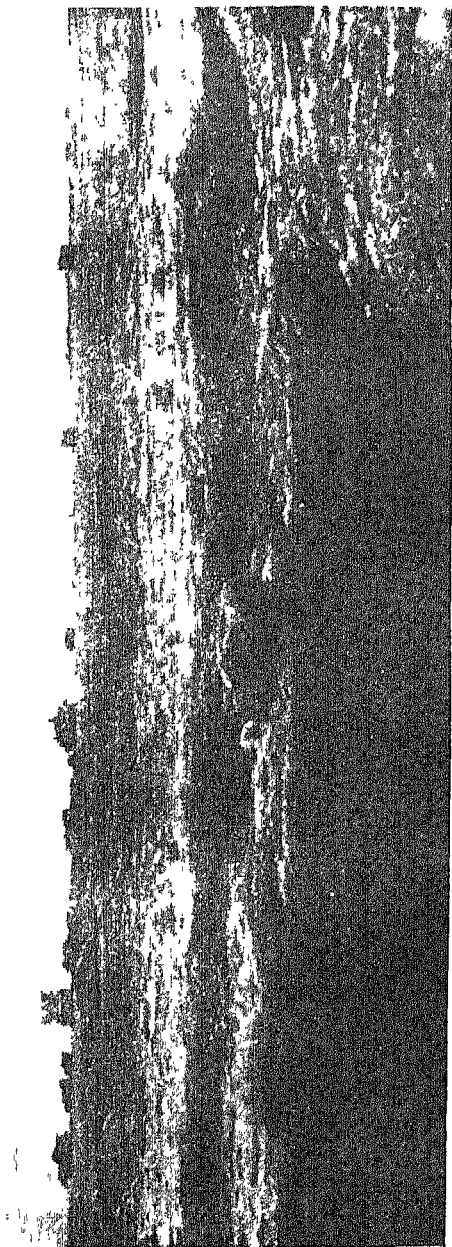
The 4th Armoured Brigade had meanwhile moved further north towards Sidi Rezegh. At 4 p.m. on December 5 a large enemy column appeared on the Mahrattas' front. It belonged to the 15th Panzer Division and the 21st was also approaching from the west. The tanks seen numbered about twenty-five and there was also a large force of lorried infantry. In front came a staff car, which was stopped and captured by some British R.A.S.C. drivers of the troop-carrying transport. The evening was just beginning to darken when the tanks bore down upon "A" and "C" Companies of the Mahrattas, followed by fleets of lorried infantry. A troop of the British anti-tank gunners and a platoon of the Brigade Anti-tank Company engaged the advancing panzers, seven guns in all. About a dozen panzers were stopped. But the odds were too great. All but one of the guns were knocked out. The tanks came on, right up to "A" Company. They were all among the Indians' slit trenches. But the Mahrattas had no intention of surrendering. The tanks could do little damage to them in their slit trenches, and any German who put his head out of a tank was a dead man. Then the German infantry arrived and all was over for that company.

In the gathering darkness the tanks moved across to "C" Company, followed closely by the infantry. In the dark the tanks were not at such great advantage. The Mahrattas were able to fight on against the enemy and in this, their death struggle, had the satisfaction

of killing many. Before the night finally descended, agonized watchers at Battalion Headquarters, powerless to intervene, saw Subedar Laxuman Chawan, the company commander, moving round from post to post under the hail of bullets, cheering on his men, while Jemadar Govind Desai led the remnants of his platoon in a charge against some too venturesome enemy. The sound of fighting continued in the darkness, but gradually died away. The second company was overrun. The delay they had caused had saved the remainder of the battalion.

That night was exciting for the 11th Brigade. It was the third night running that there had been no sleep for anyone. The German leaguer flares soared and fell all around ; the mutter of motors and the sound of digging could be heard on all sides. The remainder of the Mahrattas were completely cut off, but the telephone line was not destroyed. It was once cut but an Indian signaller went out and repaired it within fifty yards of a couple of panzers. Lieut.-Colonel M. P. Lancaster gave a running commentary, in Urdu in case the Germans were listening, telling how his battalion was reorganising, where the enemy were and what he proposed to do. Suddenly he said to the Brigade Major, "Keep quiet. There are Germans here." Five minutes tense silence followed. Then the Colonel came on the line again with the news that a couple of German officers had been captured. One column of panzers passed within six hundred yards of Brigade Headquarters. Another rattled by less than two hundred yards from the Raj Rif. In the midst of the Afrika Korps the 11th Brigade lay quiet as a mouse.

During the night the administrative vehicles were sent away to the south. Shortly before dawn the Sappers and Mahrattas threaded their way back through the Germans, embussed and disappeared also.



‘ Shells fell among the vehicles ’

The Camerons followed. The Rajputana Rifles were left to cover the withdrawal and hold out as long as possible. At 7.30 a.m. the panzers and lorries advanced on the battalion, who were ordered to retire and embus. The infantry pulled out quickly making for the transport area in rear. It was an alarming sight to see the tanks coming roaring forward, their guns belching fire through the drifting dust. Now panic is easy for the driver of a lorry. He is defenceless, but by merely putting his foot down on the accelerator he can, in a very few minutes, get himself out of danger. Not only did the British R.A.S.C. drivers not panic, but many of them drove forward towards the advancing tanks to pick up the Indian infantry. The last trucks and lorries got away when the tanks were only about six hundred yards off. The battalion was saved.

The withdrawal was covered by a rearguard of guns and tanks, but the enemy was everywhere and the rear was not necessarily the most dangerous point. It was much more like a naval battle than the normally accepted idea of land warfare. The Brigade was moving south. To the east was an enemy column steering on a converging course some two thousand yards away. To the west was another which appeared as if it would cut across the Brigade's line of march, but thought better of it. Shells fell among the British and Indian vehicles, but damage was almost *nil*. To make the affair even more like a naval action, the Germans had mortars mounted on lorries and fired on the move, with singular lack of success. The panzers following up the rearguard did not dare to close and at about 10.30 a.m. the Brigade passed through the screen of the 22nd Guards Brigade some six miles south of El Gubi. There was no further interference. The 11th Brigade had disengaged successfully from a most difficult position and had shown its high standard of training and steadiness once again.

That night Havildar Hardewa Ram of [the Rajputana Rifles came in with a story of wild adventure. He had been commanding a carrier on December 5 which was knocked out while attempting to get round the fight flank. All that afternoon they stayed there repelling attempts to round them up. Next morning Hardewa Ram found that his little party was all alone. The battalion had gone. A British armoured car approached, but when signalled, it replied with a burst of fire. The havildar signalled again and the car came up. There was no room inside so the three men hung on just anywhere on the outside—and off they started. Almost at once panzers were met. Swaying, bumping, jumping, at times leaving the ground completely, shot at from all sides, with the dust breaking in great waves right over the turret, the armoured car roared clean through the enemy column, with the three Jats clinging for dear life on the outside. They got through safely and the havildar, having said "Thank you," set off back to the battalion. The commander of the armoured car had instructed Hardewa Ram to leave his Bren-gun behind, to keep the weight down as much as possible, but that was entirely against the tradition of the Indian Army. The havildar concealed it under the camouflage netting on the armoured car and throughout that wild ride had somehow managed to spare a hand to ensure that his beloved gun was safe. On arrival he showed it proudly to Brigadier Anderson.

The 11th Brigade had suffered severely in this action, particularly the Camerons and Mahrattas. The Highlanders lost sixteen officers killed and wounded. Three hundred and eighty of the enemy had been captured with more than fifty lorries, and afterwards the bodies of many Italians were found unburied on the battlefield. The Brigade had shown its usual dour fighting qualities, and when attacked by tanks in the open had disengaged with great skill. The reputation

of the Brigade was even higher after this fierce battle.

The Relief of Tobruk

While the action at El Gubi was being fought, 4th Division Headquarters with the 5th and 7th Brigades had moved to an area some twelve miles south-east of the battleground. Here the 22nd Guards Brigade, which had been outriders of the action, came under command of the Division, and at long last the 11th Brigade returned to the fold. The 4th Indian Division was complete for the first time since its return from Eritrea in the spring. The 4th British Armoured Brigade was also moved down to the south of the battle line to protect the infantry, deal with enemy columns and provide such a threat that the enemy would not dare to throw his forces against the 4th Division.

Three days of heavy confused fighting followed. This was the genuine desert mobile warfare, which always took place when the defence lines of one side or the other were broken or by-passed. Columns of tanks, guns and lorried infantry ranged widely everywhere. Any approaching vehicle or any cloud of dust might herald friend or foe. At night one column might cut right through another and never find out to whom it belonged. All through these days and nights columns were bumping into each other, exchanging fire and losing contact in the clouds of dust. Everyone had to be on the alert the whole time ; sleep, always a stranger during active operations, became almost unknown.

The *Luftwaffe* had been active throughout the battle. The R.A.F. were not able to give adequate cover owing to the distance forward from British advanced landing grounds. Stukas and Messerschmidts took full advantage of the opportunity. Five Stukas were shot down on one day.

During these days of short, fierce exchanges, in which columns from all three Brigades took part, the commander of the 15th Panzer Division was mortally wounded. On December 7 there were indications that the Axis intended to withdraw. Now that Tobruk had been relieved, the perimeter of the fortress stood like a salient round the northern flank. The 13th Corps, with which the garrison of the fortress had now been amalgamated, menaced the enemy in the north. The 4th Indian Division was a threat to the south, while the 7th Armoured Division covered the centre and forbade concentration against either flank. It was time for Rommel to be moving back.

On December 8 the Indian Division began to advance. In front went the 5th and 7th Brigades followed by the 11th. The 7th passed to the east of El Gubi directed on El Adem. The 5th moved west of the battle-ground towards Acroma. The Central India Horse provided a screen in front, feeling its way and reporting all enemy movements to the forces coming along behind.

The Brigades pushed steadily forward and made some contact with the enemy who, threatened by the hammer of the 4th Division and the anvil of Tobruk, made haste to get away westward. Late on the afternoon of December 9, advanced troops of the 7th Brigade topped the low ridge south of El Adem. Three miles away could be seen the fine airfield and converging roads. There was some gun-fire along the Trigh Capuzzo but the airfield itself was silent and deserted. That evening El Adem was occupied and contact made with a British Brigade from Tobruk.

Twenty miles to the west, where later a board in a tar barrel bore the name of ill omen—Knightsbridge—the 5th Brigade found the Central India Horse held up by rearguards. One squadron had, however, slipped through to the north and reached the escarpment

which overlooks the coastal corridor. Below them the enemy withdrawal was in full swing. The squadron scrambled down to the plain and raced forward in their trucks. There the cavalymen fell upon group after group of unprotected transport, destroying many lorries, shooting others up and taking a considerable number of prisoners.

The next job was to get away. The squadron was completely surrounded and in the darkness was being swept along westward by the huge flow of retreating Germans and Italians. The breakout was successfully accomplished by night and one hundred and fifty of the best prisoners, mostly Germans, were brought back. One section, however, got left behind. Next morning Lance-Daffadar Janak Singh with two trucks found himself balked at every turn, and was carried along to the west. For twelve miles the two trucks were chased by armoured cars and finally found their way blocked by twenty of these powerful vehicles. Janak Singh decided to try to shoot his way out. With rifles and Bren-guns blazing from the old Chevrolet trucks, the section charged the armoured cars. One truck was lost, but the other broke through, eluded pursuit and rejoined the regiment five days later.

During the night the Axis abandoned their rearguard positions in front of the 5th Brigade. Next morning the advance continued. Prisoners were taken and the 7th Brigade reached the old stone fort at Acroma. Actually the first to arrive was the Division Commander. General Messervy, with Brigadier Mirrlees and a few others, had taken part in a sort of point-to-point race, outdistancing not only the infantry but also the cavalry screen. In the fort two Italians were found asleep. After lunch and a visit by Messerschmidts, whose aim was fortunately inaccurate owing to the "khamseen" which was now raising the dust, the party set off back. On their way the Headquarters party met

Colonel George and his Central India Horse moving up to capture Acroma.

Shortly after the position had been occupied, a battalion of the 16th British Brigade, old comrades of 1940 and Sidi Barrani, came in from Tobruk, proving that the entire perimeter of the fortress was free of the enemy.

The 5th Brigade, keeping pace with the 7th on the left, ran into enemy defences west of Acroma. Without any delay the three battalions flung themselves forward. The 4/6th Rajputana Rifles seized one point on the escarpment. The Buffs rushed another, capturing more than one hundred prisoners. The 3/1st Punjabis bowled through the centre and reached the main escarpment. The Mediterranean gleamed in the distance. The 4th Division had squeezed the Axis out westward. To add to the feeling of jubilation, the C.I.H. sent in a further one hundred and fifty prisoners. It had been a good day.

Orders were now received for following up the retreating enemy. The 7th Armoured Division moved across to the desert flank of the 4th Division. The hunt was up. These two famous divisions, the original desert formations, set off in pursuit of Rommel.

It was during this period that Rommel issued an order to his men telling them that they must not expect to see much of the *Luftwaffe*, as it was concentrating against the Indian Red Eagle Division advancing from the south. The red flying eagle was the insignia of the 4th Indian Division.

SIX

The Battle of Alem Hamza

THE 13th Corps was given charge of the operations in pursuit of Rommel. The forces under command were the 7th British Armoured Division, the 4th Indian Division, the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, which had moved forward from the frontier, and the Polish Brigade from Tobruk. Supply limitations dictated the strength of the pursuing force. The Eighth Army had advanced more than ninety miles already and, as the frontier defences had still to be reduced, there was fighting on two widely separated fronts. The R.A.F. had to move forward to captured airfields with stores, bombs, ground staffs and all the vast amount of equipment that is required to keep aeroplanes in the air. Tobruk harbour required much work to make it ready as a forward base for the whole army, and the ships supplying it had still to run the gauntlet of the Cretan airfields. The next few days saw aggravating but inevitable delays in the advance owing to the non-arrival of petrol, ammunition and water.

The plan for the pursuit was that the New Zealand Brigade should advance along the main road and hold the enemy in the Gazala position. At the same time the 4th Indian Division would move west above the escarpment, by-passing Gazala and then

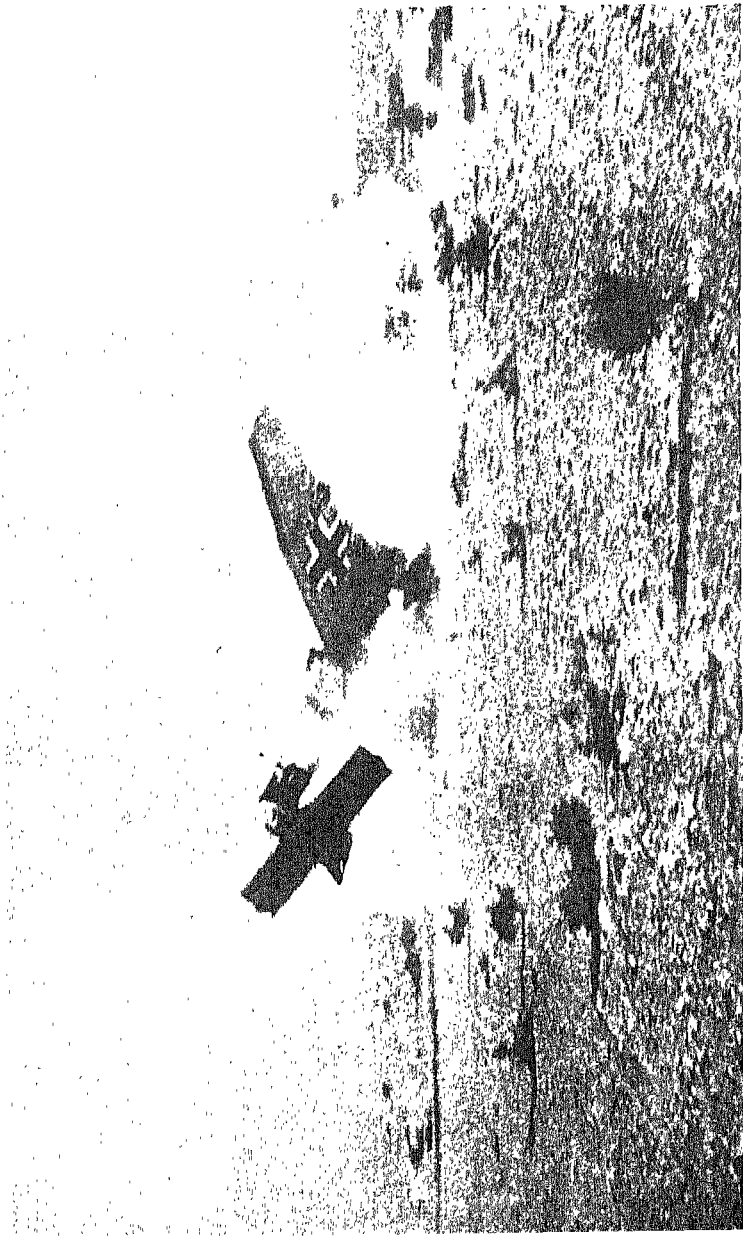
turning north-west to Halegh el Eleba. After that one Brigade would move to Tmimi and close the bolt hole. The 7th Armoured Division would operate on the desert flank of the Indian Division and would be ready to swing behind the enemy and cut his retreat.

Before the move started, General Messervy asked that the 11th Brigade should be left in Tobruk. This was not only because of the casualties received at El Gubi, but also because the administrative situation would not permit three brigades to be taken forward at the moment. Thus the pursuit was undertaken by one somewhat battered Armoured Division and four Infantry Brigades, two of which had already suffered considerable casualties.

Owing to supply difficulties the advance could not start until the afternoon of December 11. Then the 5th Brigade moved on the right, keeping possibly a couple of miles below the crest of the ridge. The 7th Brigade was on the left, with Division Headquarters and the reserve in the centre in rear. One squadron of the Central India Horse accompanied each Brigade and the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles was with Headquarters.

Next morning the advance began again at 5 a.m., still due west. When dawn broke, Headquarters found itself leading the Division, having passed through between the Brigades in the darkness. Both had been delayed by lack of petrol, but they pushed on slowly throughout the day.

During these days the Stukas were very active, attacking all parts of the Division. On December 12 no less than thirteen attacks were made on the Headquarters column. Casualties were few, but some lorries were hit, making supply even more complicated. That the damage was not more severe was mainly due to the excellent shooting of the 57th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment R.A. The gunners broke up enemy formations and began to take a toll of aircraft. Towards



" . . . began to take a toll of aircraft."

the end of this rather exhausting day, an invitation was sent to the R.A.F. to come and join the party.

The worst sufferers from these attacks were the Divisional Signals. The wireless operators have a horrid job under these conditions. They sit in their trucks in the bare open desert, with headphones clamped to their ears and, if a message is coming through when a raid occurs, there they stay. And it is the same under shell fire. Although the second operator and the driver can drop into slit trenches when death comes whistling down, the men on duty take a pride in never being driven from their sets. This calls for icy courage and the steadiest of nerves. Awards to the Royal Corps of Signals and the Indian Signal Corps are greatly to be respected. During these attacks Lieut.-Colonel Gray, commanding the Divisional Signals, dived head first into a slit trench at the same moment that a five-hundred pound bomb smashed his staff car into a thousand pieces.

On December 13 the enemy was encountered in strength. Later, after extensive reconnaissances had probed the position, it became clear that the Axis forces were holding a line from Gazala to Alem Hamza, and thence to Sidi Breghisc and the Trigh el Abd. The defences were well prepared and cleverly sited. It may have been only a rearguard position but, from the determined way it was held and the amount of stores later captured in the rear areas, it appears likely that it was Rommel's intention to stand on this line.

The 5th Brigade was the first to come into action, when Axis troops were encountered some three miles south of Alem Hamza. In this part of the desert the low ridge runs east and west, commanding all the lower ground to the south. North of the ridge the land drops steadily to the coast, so that if once the ridge were crossed the Axis would have to retreat once

again. The obvious thing to do was to break through the line. The 5th Brigade moved forward to do so at once.

Two battalions were launched to the attack. The 4th Bn. (Outram's) 6th Rajputana Rifles were directed on Points 205-208, while the 1st Bn. The Buffs went for Point 204. Outram's had some success at the start, Captain Arthur Knowles with his company sweeping round and taking several prisoners. But the left company was held up and lost many men. In coming to their help Knowles was wounded for the second time in the war, having been shot through the face at Keren. This gallant officer refused to be evacuated and was afterwards killed with his forward platoon. It was now clear that the position was strongly held.

The Buffs, on the other hand, took Point 204 against negligible opposition. The area round this point was no different from any other part of the ridge, but at that moment it was more or less a gap in the line. Later events proved that it was the hinge on which the rest of the German defences hung. The ease with which the Buffs occupied this joint in the enemy's armour is rather mystifying. It is probable that for some reason the force ordered to hold that sector had been delayed. Later in the afternoon German tanks and lorried infantry approached the hill from the north and appeared surprised when fired upon. They scurried away leaving four tanks and some vehicles behind them.

The Action at Sidi Breghisc

While these events were occurring at the eastern end of the line, the 7th Brigade was feeling its way forward to the west, seeking a likely place to attack. It was decided to assault the southern end of the Axis line with the 4th Bn. 11th Sikh Regiment, supported by the 25th Field Regiment and twelve tanks of the 8th Royal Tank Regiment.

At noon the armoured carriers of the Sikhs went out to reconnoitre the enemy position and the ground over which the battalion would have to advance. At the same time the battalion passed forward through the guns of the 25th Field Regiment and began to de-bus in the open. Shortly after enemy shell fire increased in intensity and tanks appeared some distance away to the north-west. As the Sikhs had had no time to dig, they were ordered to withdraw behind the Field Regiment, and lorries went up to bring them back. The gunners prepared for battle—the battle of their lives.

The desert stretches away on all sides, apparently limitless, but in the north rising gradually to the top of the Sidi Breghisc ridge. The sun is already beginning to drop in the west, but is not yet low enough to blind the eyes of the gunners. The shells from the enemy guns on the ridge fall among the dispersed vehicles, throwing up pillars of dust but doing little damage. The 25th Field Regiment R.A. holds the centre of the stage facing north-west, with its 31/58th Battery in front and its 12/25th Battery behind; sixteen powerful guns manned by seasoned British gunners. To the left are the twelve tanks. Behind them, protecting the left flank of the guns, are a troop of the 65th Anti-tank Regiment R.A., a troop of 57th Light Anti-aircraft Regiment R.A., and the 7th Brigade Anti-tank Company, one platoon from each of the three infantry battalions. The 4th Bn. 16th Punjab Regiment is moving up in support. Something over a mile to the east another field regiment is coming into action.

Out of a slight hollow some four thousand yards in front come eight, seventeen, twenty-six, No! THIRTY-NINE panzers! Behind come lorried infantry and guns, three hundred vehicles at least. Nearly thirty of the tanks are the heavy Mark IV's and the

remainder are the only slightly less powerful Mark III's. As they come the panzers are shooting at the Sikhs, who are embussing, and at the battalion carriers, who are covering the retreat. One of the Sikh companies is cut off and disappears. (It rejoined next day.) The artillery are ordered to engage the enemy. The fight is on!

Enemy guns are coming into action also, covering the panzers' advance. The 25th Field engages them and a fierce artillery duel ensues. The guns of both sides are in the open, clearly visible to each other and at short range for field artillery. The panzers quicken up the fire, which falls thickly round the devoted gunners. The other field regiment has also come into action, engaging the enemy guns and "soft-skinned" transport at longer range. The noise is deafening. The dust rises in clouds, shot with flames.

The tank attack is directed head on at 31/58th Battery. 7th Brigade Headquarters can hear over the wireless the Gun Position Officer reporting what is happening. "No. 1 Gun's crew are all down. No. 4 Gun's ammunition is on fire. Masters (the troop commander) has run across to No. 4. No. 2 Gun is out—a direct hit. No. 3 Gun is silent, so is No. 4. No! They aren't. Masters and a sergeant, I can't see who it is, are serving No. 3. It's Sergeant Simmington. Now they're running across to No. 4. They're loading, sighting and firing both guns, running across from one to the other. Simmington's down. Now Masters is down too, right amongst the men lying round No. 3. He's heaving himself up. He's saying something.* He's down again. "D" Troop is out."

Away at the back are the "quads," the tractors that draw the guns and carry the crews. They are on the move. They are coming forward right into the

* Masters who had been shot through both legs, remarked to the wounded men lying round him "Gout's a bit troublesome to-day."



25-pounders in action.

inferno. They're amongst the guns now. The drivers are picking up the wounded and putting them into the "quads." They are on their way back. They have brought back all the wounded from "D" and "E" Troops.

The full shock is now taken by "E" Troop. The tanks are sweeping down on it from both north and west. The bullets are kicking up little spurts of dust all around and whining away into the distance. Two guns are out of action. Major Newell, the battery commander, is serving a gun with one gunner. The panzers are amongst the silent guns of "D" Troop. Some of the guns are cocked at queer angles; others remain sullenly pointing towards the enemy. Now "E" Troop is silent also. 31/58th Battery is overrun.

But 12/25th Battery is taking up the fight. Previously they have been engaging the lorries and guns in rear by indirect fire. Now they fight the tanks at point-blank range. The anti-tank guns are also hard at it, preventing an attempt to outflank the field guns. The British tanks have drawn away some of the panzers and are fighting it out on their own to the west. Above the din can be heard the distinctive Bang! Bang! Bang! of the Bofors, as the Ack-Ack gunners engage slower but far tougher opponents than the Stukas. The other field regiment continues to plaster the guns and lorries following the panzers. More ammunition is sent across to 12/25th Battery.

The battle rises in a crescendo. The roar of the guns, the crash of the shells, the crack of the bullets and whine of ricochets, combine to make coherent thought impossible. But the gunners have but one thought—to smash the enemy. Blackened, bleeding, soaked in sweat, caked with dust, hardly human in appearance, the gunners fight on.

"Hallo! What's happening? The panzers have halted. Their lorries are turning away to the north.

They're retreating. By God, we've beaten the b——! Now they're out of range. CEASE FIRING."

Alem Hamza

The 7th Brigade was saved by this terrific fight at Sidi Breghise, but the casualties had not been light. Fifty-eight officers and men of the 25th Field Regiment had been killed or wounded round their guns. The Sikhs and the anti-tank gunners had not escaped without loss. Five guns of 31/58th Battery were disabled by direct hits and three more silenced when every man of their crews was down. As the dust settled, in the gathering dusk, the damage inflicted on the enemy could be seen. Strewn over some fifteen square miles of desert were tanks and lorries, little plumes of dark, greasy smoke rising above them. Fourteen panzers had been stopped and others damaged. Little parties of sappers and miners set out in the dark to try to find and finish off the damaged panzers. At the same time German recovery parties were also at work, and when morning dawned only six gaunt wrecks remained. The 25th Field Regiment recovered every one of its guns.

Once again the Germans had discovered that British guns cannot be taken on by panzers, even when supported by German artillery. The attempt to scupper the 7th Brigade had failed but the British attack had been delayed. Rommel's men had an extra twenty-four hours to make their defences stronger.

The Division's game book for the day made good reading:—

Panzers	..	..	..	8
Stukas	..	..	..	4
Messerschmidts	..	..	..	1
Prisoners—				
Officers	..	..	..	21
Other Ranks	..	..	..	350

Both Brigades remained in contact with the enemy throughout the next day (December 14). Owing to shortage of ammunition the 7th Brigade were able to take no action except vigorous patrolling. On the 5th Brigade front another attempt was made to widen the gap in the enemy line. Outram's were unable to make progress in their attack on Points 205-208. The position appeared to be even stronger than the day before. It was later ascertained that the Axis regarded the loss of Point 204 as most serious. The line on either side of the gap had been strengthened and the garrisons ordered to hold on at all costs.

During the day two attacks were made on the Buffs' position. The first came in at 1 p.m. and the 31st Field enjoyed good shooting. Four panzers were destroyed and others winged. This attack was probably a reconnaissance in force, to ascertain the extent of the position and the actual sites of the guns. At half past three a much more determined effort was made. The tanks and gunners with the Buffs fought with the greatest staunchness, but the attack was also pushed with fine determination. Ammunition was rushed up, arriving in the nick of time, and the Axis forces were driven back. The position was still held.

The pressure, however, was great. Although the 4th Division still held the advantage, it was by the narrowest of margins. In fact the two Brigades were hanging on by their eyelids. At any moment a strong counter-attack might overwhelm any part of the line, and with the Armoured Division far away this might be disastrous to the whole of the Indian Division. General Messervy, however, had no intention of handing the initiative to the enemy. The Armoured Division was circling round to the rear of the Axis line and would, it was hoped, reach Halegh el Eleba about midday on December 15. This would draw off the Axis armour and would relieve pressure on the Alem

Hamza front. To coincide with the arrival of the British armour in the rear areas, General Messervy ordered the 7th Brigade to attack Point 201 while the 5th Brigade made another attempt to seize Points 205-208.

The attack next morning by the 3/1st Punjabis and Outram's on Points 205-208 was not successful. Heavy shelling fell on the Punjabis while they were forming up. The infantry were pinned down in the open by heavy machine-gun fire and both battalions suffered a number of casualties. The enemy had no intention of being forced from this vital stronghold.

A Glorious Defeat

During the morning great activity was reported all along the front of the 5th Brigade, particularly opposite Point 204. A squadron of the C.I.H., reconnoitring out in front, was driven in. Tanks, lorried infantry and guns were seen moving about. It was all too evident that something would happen shortly. A captured German volunteered the information that he would not be a prisoner for long as the position was going to be attacked that afternoon. He was hurried back to Brigade Headquarters, who sent up all available reinforcements of guns.

The garrison of Point 204 was now quite strong and the position had been held for forty-eight hours which should have been long enough to prepare adequate defences. The garrison consisted of:—

- 1st Bn. The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment).
- 31st Field Regiment R.A.
- One squadron, The Central India Horse.
- One Battery, 73rd Anti-tank Regiment R.A.
- One Troop, 57th L.A.A. Regiment R.A.
- One Section, 18th Field Company Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners.
- Ten Tanks.

At 2 p.m. the enemy attack opened with a furious artillery bombardment. Some forty heavy tanks appeared, supported by numerous guns and a large force of lorried infantry. Later it was learnt that the infantry was the 115th Lorried Infantry Regiment (a regiment is equivalent to a British Brigade), and that the orders were to destroy all the British forces on that part of the front, i.e., the 5th Brigade, and to exploit to the maximum.

The enemy artillery concentration was intense, far surpassing anything experienced by the 4th Division in all its previous campaigns. It was obviously the prelude to an attack on a decisive scale. The bombardment began at a range of about three thousand yards, with Mark IV tanks thickening up the barrage. Under cover of this shoot the Mark III tanks filtered forward. This concentration of fire was directed upon the field and anti-tank gunners, in an attempt to blast them out of existence before they could interfere with the tanks. At the same time lorried infantry crept forward on both flanks to within machine-gun range, and their galling fire mowed down the devoted gunners. The gun positions had not been sufficiently well prepared and the infantry dispositions did not protect them from machine-gun fire from the flanks. Hopelessly outnumbered the few British tanks fought a retiring action, though one stayed to fight it out on its own. From all directions the Germans brought overwhelming force to bear.

The gunners, and the infantry as well, were falling fast. A few thousand yards behind the action, 5th Brigade Headquarters, consisting of vehicles dispersed on the wind-swept plain, heard a tale of disaster unfold. Radio communication was maintained to the end and Lieut.-Colonel L. E. King of the Buffs gave a running commentary on the progress of the fight. Minute by minute this well planned and executed

attack exploited every weakness of the Buffs' position and dispositions. The Brigade Staff listened with the full realisation that gallantry was confronted with ruthless efficiency and great superiority, and there could only be one end. "I am afraid that this is the last time I shall speak to you," said Colonel King. "They are right on top of my headquarters." Then the Sikh signaller took over. "Last message, sahib, I am breaking the set. *Sat Siri Akal!*" His war-cry, a crash and silence.

The Buffs and gunners fought to the end. There was no question of retirement. A few survivors filtered back after dark. The 31st Field Regiment found just enough men to reform on a weak one-battery basis. Some of the Headquarters Company of the Buffs, amounting to about one hundred men, managed to escape. For when the British guns had been mastered at a cost of eleven Mark IV tanks completely destroyed, the enemy tanks crashed over the Buffs' position, with Tommy-gunners riding on their backs and infantry in close support. The guns, fought to the last, were rolled into the ground by the panzers. When the panzer rush had passed, some of the infantry and sappers and miners were still fighting, and met the infantry with a blaze of fire. But this was merely delaying the end and by nightfall all was silent at Point 204.

From an intercept picked up later, it was learnt that the German losses had been so heavy that the German commander reported that he was unable to continue the fight. Nor was there any further attack, to the great relief of the practically defenceless Punjabis and Raj Rif, lying in the open opposite Points 205-208. The great defence of Point 204 had saved the 5th Brigade and possibly the whole of the 4th Division. That night the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles sent out patrols to see if they could effect any rescues but found the

position well held. Lieutenant McLeod found an apparently deserted lorry right inside the position. On opening the door of the cab, he found the Italian driver fast asleep. Pausing a moment to try to remember his few words of Italian, he then whispered fiercely "*Alto in Mano*" sticking his pistol into the enemy's stomach. "*Mani in Alto*" corrected the Italian politely also in a whisper, and complied with the order.

December 16 was a comparatively quiet day for the 4th Indian Division. The 7th Brigade was withdrawn slightly to conform with the alignment of the 5th Brigade, and the day was spent in digging and vigorous patrolling. The enemy remained in position all along the line, but elsewhere stirring events were happening. Away to the west the 7th Armoured Division had passed round the southern extremity of the enemy line and during the day reached Halegh el Eleba, raiding the lines of communication. During the day there were indications that the Axis armour was moving west to meet this threat and pressure on the 4th Division front was consequently relieved. It was also a great help to the New Zealand and Polish Brigades, who were fighting along the coast road. The Poles carried out a dashing attack which broke the Axis line south of Gazala. It looked as if the victory at Alem Hamza might have been achieved at the cost of isolation of all Axis forces east of Tmimi.

The 1st South African Brigade came forward to help the 4th Division and was placed under its command. Next morning it was intended to attack the southern end of the line with the South Africans and the 7th Brigade, assisted by the 42nd Royal Tank Regiment. This tank battalion had fought with the greatest gallantry at the Omars and the Division was delighted to see them again. With the comparatively small forces available in the desert war, there were units such as gunners, tanks and machine-gunners,

who were placed under the command of first one formation and then another. Some of those who fought alongside the Division endeared themselves to British and Indian soldiers alike. They were regarded as friends and part of the Division. Friendship between units, whether infantry, tanks, gunners, signals, medical or supply, is the real basis that makes a good formation.

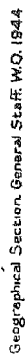
The enemy was well aware of the danger in which he lay. On the night of December 16, he withdrew to the west and, keeping well into the desert, avoided action with the 7th Armoured Division, closing on his rear. The 4th Division's attack for the next morning was called off and pursuit organised. The 4th Indian Division was given the task of clearing the Jebel country, while the 7th Armoured Division followed up the mobile forces retreating through the desert by way of Mekili. The 5th and 7th Brigades formed mobile columns with objectives seventy miles ahead at Martuba and Carmusa. The 1st South African Brigade followed in rear. Before midday on December 17 the Division was on the move once again.

SEVEN

Conquest of the Jebel

FOR one hundred and forty miles, from Tmimi to Benghazi, the Cyrenaican desert ends and the Jebel Akhdar rears its high headland against the Mediterranean. At its centre this rocky crescent sinks into the desert some forty miles from the sea. It forms a cloud and wind barrier, yielding plentiful rains. So the Jebel is a green and fruitful expanse, carpeted with grasses, gay with flowers in spring and summer; its stony ridges clad with bright shrubs and bushes and, in the deep wadis and canyons, with tall and lovely trees. The crest of the watershed runs parallel to the Mediterranean twenty to thirty miles inland. Some seventy miles east of Benghazi the height of land swings to the south-west, following the line of the Gulf of Sirte. The easy contours of the rich Barce valley intrude between the coastal ridges and the main Jebel massif. The last greenness dies fifteen miles east of Benghazi, where the coastal plain squeezes off the Dahar el Ahmar ridges. Thence to the south, a steep escarpment marks the edge of the desert plateau for nearly one hundred miles, until it dies away in broken country round Antelat.

At Gazala inlet, forty miles west of Tobruk, the dusty soil yields to a loam, and the main road traverses



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a grassy savannah until the gateway of the Jebel is reached at Tmimi. Here the headland begins to rise and the road winds through rocky upland downs, first to the north and then to the north-west, until Martuba is reached on the tableland at a height of 1,500 feet above the sea. The main road turns down into Derna across a flat plateau, which affords excellent landing grounds. Derna aerodrome itself stands at the top of the escarpment, with the port on a small tongue of land below. The cliff is precipitous and the road zigzags down in a series of cleverly constructed switchbacks. Ten miles to the west of Derna the road climbs the escarpment once again, and after being joined by a partially completed by-pass from Martuba, strikes inland through a series of small valleys, which gradually widen to afford a rolling landscape studded with alternate pastures and woodlands—a country reminiscent of the maritime provinces of Canada. Jovanni Berta, however, built into the hillside some twenty-five miles west of Derna, might be a village in the Italian Campagna.

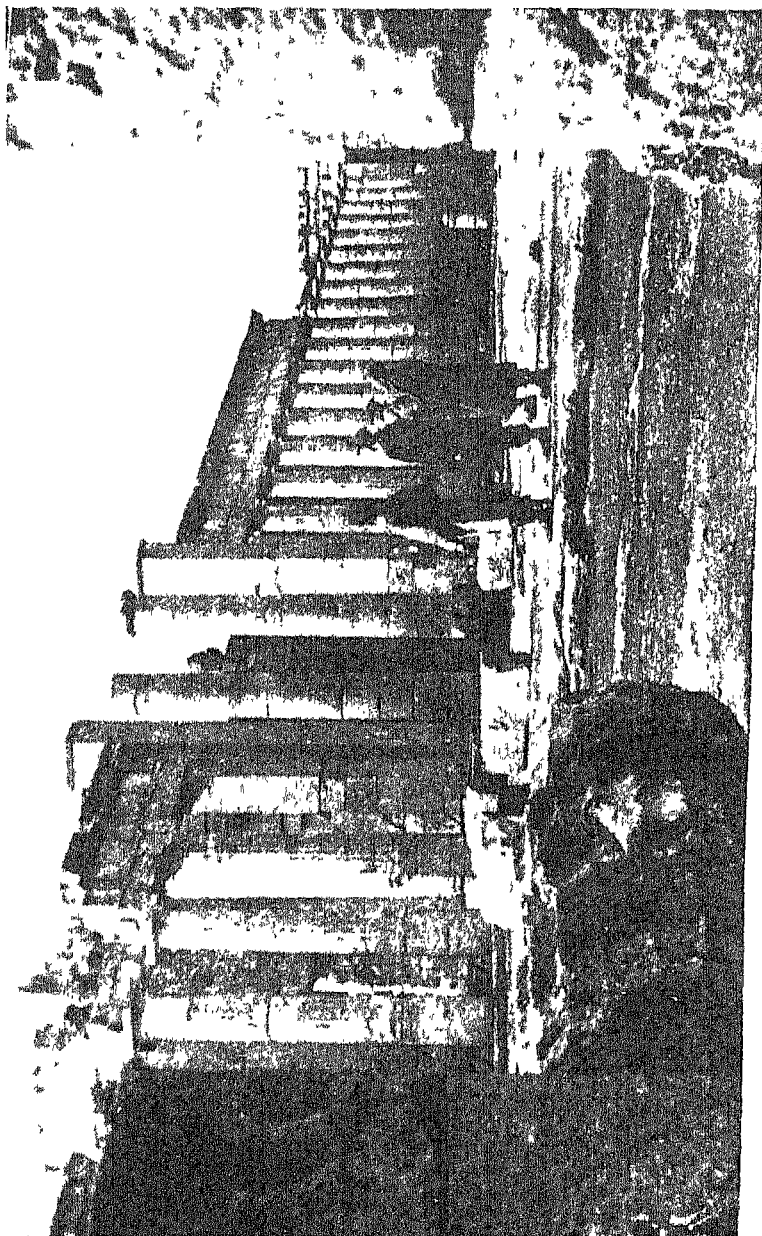
From here onwards the main road to the west is a magnificently constructed tourist highway flowing through an attractive countryside, with glimpses of white cottages, neat checkerboard fields and rolling pasture lands. The road climbs steadily until, at Cirene cross-roads, a height of over two thousand feet is reached. There on the edge of an inner plateau stands Cirene, famous city of antiquity, serene in death; below the ruins the old Roman road winds down to Appolonia on the sea coast, with the grooves of chariot wheels still showing on the face of the roadway.

The route becomes even more picturesque as it traverses the uplands through Lucia Razza, where an excellent vintage is grown, into a deep, cyprus-clad canyon, the road hung onto abutments built into the

sides of the cliffs. So, on across hill and valley, until a narrow defile opens to a view of the market town of Barce (pronounced Barche), and the heavily settled townships of that rich valley. Beyond Barce crops are continuous for fifteen miles, till the road emerges on the top of the escarpment above Tocra, and winds down a tortuous pass to the coast. Forty miles of flat straight highway brings the traveller to the outskirts of Benghazi, along a series of causeways built between salt marshes.

Such is the main east to west route ; but there are two principal roads through the Jebel. They form a figure of eight with Barce as their confluence. Between Lamluda, ten miles west of Jovanni Berta, and Barce the roads are parallel at a distance of approximately fifteen miles. Between Barce and Benghazi the second route follows the Barce valley to the south-west, and emerges from the Dahar el Ahmar ridges at Benina aerodrome, twelve miles to the east of the port. These two roads constitute the only possible routes through the Jebel, for the country is too broken and precipitous to allow cross-country short cuts or navigation by dead-reckoning. A number of trails enter the Jebel from the southern desert, notably from Mekili to Derna and to Jovanni Berta, and further west from Charruba to El Abiar and Marawa. But on the whole the Jebel is isolated from the south.

This topography defines the strategical value—or rather lack of value—of the Jebel Akhdar. There is no purpose in trying to enter this difficult terrain when it can be so conveniently by-passed. The open desert allows forces to advance on an east-west axis along the chord of the Jebel arc at speeds which cannot be equalled in the mountainous country itself. This fact was recognised by the little Western Desert Force in the early winter of 1941, enabling the 7th Armoured Division to intercept the Italian army retreating



'Cirene—serene in death.'

southwards along the coast. Benghazi, therefore, is impossibly sited for defence, and the Jebel must always lie at the mercy of the victor in the desert.

The configuration of the Jebel is the key to the operations which began on December 17 and ended with the stabilisation at Gazala in the first week of February. When the Axis withdrawal began, Rommel left the shattered Italian 21st Corps to make its way back to Benghazi as best it could. His Armoured Divisions and more coherent formations took the desert route westward. The Jebel actions of the 4th Indian Division, therefore, were less a test of strength than of speed and endurance. The Italians threw up no more than weak rearguards and withdrew rapidly. Whenever it was possible to by-pass the rearguards the battle was over as soon as a handful of men blocked the two main roads. But it was only possible to out across country on a few occasions and consequently the remnants of the 21st Corps were usually able to keep ahead of their pursuers. In the meantime Rommel managed to call the tune in his retirement by the desert route and arrived at sanctuary at Jedabya without much loss, except for stores. When his retreat ended, his forces were not in such bad condition as some imagined, and his refitments and reinforcements came up more rapidly than had been expected.

In the Jebel operations, therefore, the 4th Division, both going and coming back, danced to the desert piping. They conformed to events in the south in whose shaping they had no part.

Derna

The Division started off in pursuit at 10 a.m. on December 17. On the right went the 5th Brigade, moving by way of tracks on Martuba. On the left the 7th Brigade moved on a straight bearing for Carmusa, fifteen miles west of Martuba on the Derna by-pass. The South Africans followed in rear. In front were the

Central India Horse and a South African Reconnaissance Regiment, with orders to harry the enemy and do the maximum damage; both regiments delighted to have a real cavalry role.

Very bad going was struck by the 5th Brigade. The ground mounted steadily, cut by watercourses and seamed with ridges that appeared to follow no ordered plan. In and out the columns of vehicles wound, facing now north, now east, now west, but always getting on. If a lorry stuck, those in rear passed on while the crew and passengers pushed, dug, heaved and finally got their vehicle on the move again. In addition Stukas selected the Brigade for special attention. Load after load of bombs hurtled down on the struggling troops. Yet by nightfall thirty miles had been made.

The 7th Brigade, however, managed to stick to the desert for some distance and by the evening were a dozen miles in front of the other. The plan was therefore changed. The 7th Brigade was told to rush on to Carmusa and then turn east to Martuba and Derna, while the 5th Brigade cut across its tail directed on Giovanni Berta.

This plan succeeded brilliantly. The 7th Brigade's rapid advance across country resulted in a very unpleasant surprise for the enemy. At 11 a.m. on the 18th Carmusa was reached. Leaving the 4/16th Punjabis to secure the Derna by-pass, the Royal Sussex raced back twelve miles along the road to Martuba. On the way they captured an Italian tank complete with crew, one heavy gun, some Italians and lorries. They threw themselves onto Martuba airfield, destroying three aircraft and securing huge dumps of bombs and stores.

The 4/11th Sikhs passed through the Royal Sussex, wheeled to the left at Martuba and, pushing through a defile, came within sight of the long straight highway

which leads between the Derna airfields to the edge of the escarpment. Five miles away aeroplanes could be seen landing and taking off constantly. The road itself was choked with transport. Two companies of the Sikhs were dropped to block the road against forces retreating from the east, while the Bren carriers and the remainder of the battalion scrambled down onto the plain. Then the carriers led the charge. The enemy columns were completely unprepared as the carriers and lorried infantry swept down upon them shooting them up in Wild West fashion. Three hundred prisoners, five 88-mm. guns and many vehicles were captured. Such transport as escaped stampeded down the road towards the brink of the cliffs above Derna. The carriers poured onto the airfields, and riddled planes, large and small. Transport planes, bombers, fighters, gliders, all were destroyed or captured in the wild scrimmage.

In the midst of this action, twelve large JU 52 troop carriers appeared overhead, circled and settled in. The Sikhs, scarcely believing their luck, held their fire until the last plane glided down. Then all opened fire as if on a single word of command. Rifles, machine-guns, mortars, anti-tank guns, field guns and even pistols were used to pour a storm of shot and shell into the Junkers. Eight of these large aircraft were shot to pieces. Two got off the ground but crashed. Out of the dozen only two managed to get away, with the Sikhs hoping that shortage of petrol would account for them also. The escort of ME. 110's turned up belatedly and raked the aerodrome but without result.

The jubilant Sikhs found themselves in possession of tremendous booty. Halfaya and Bardia were being maintained from Derna and no less than 183 enemy aircraft, both sound and damaged, were captured on the landing grounds. Thousands of bombs were stacked

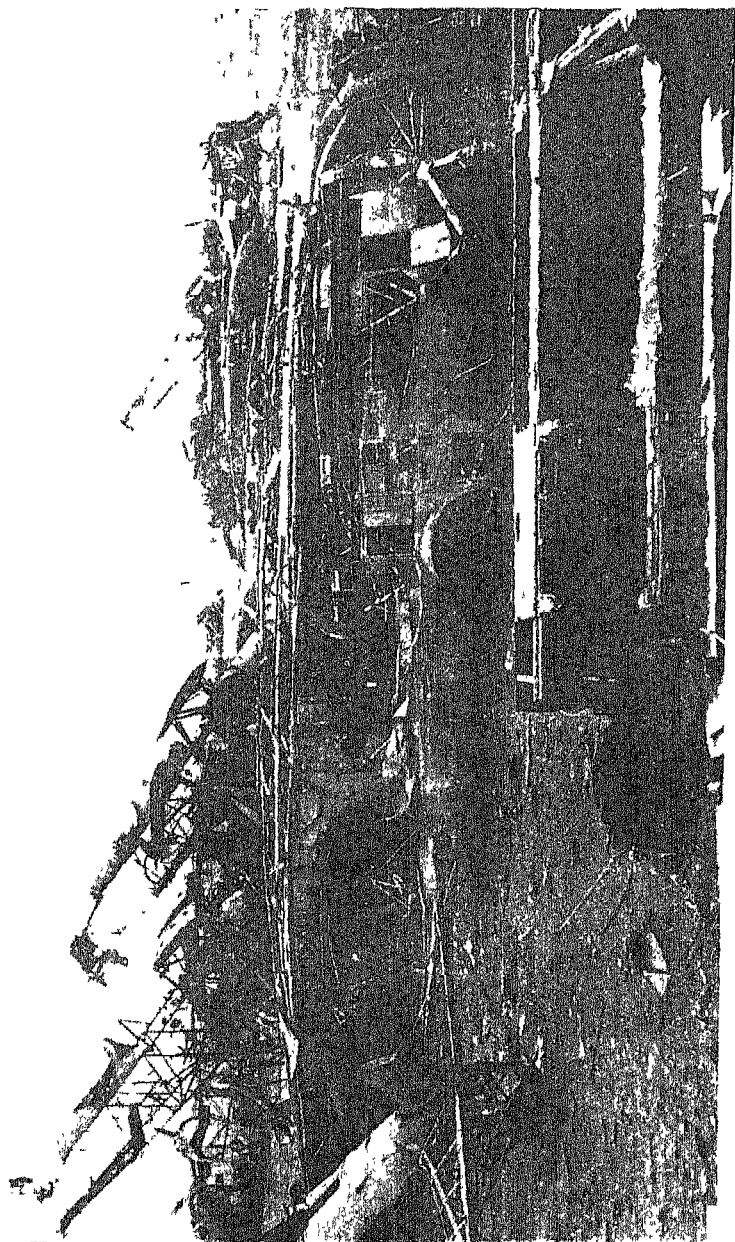
round about, as well as large quantities of petrol, wine and food. From contemplation of such an appetising scene the Sikhs tore themselves away with reluctance, and by nightfall had reached the edge of the escarpment. Looking down they saw the snug town and port of Derna eight hundred feet below.

The speed of the advance had completely surprised the enemy. No attempt had been made to clear the airfields or destroy the huge quantities of stores. Near Martuba was a large hutted camp which had been evacuated in a great hurry, so much so that a meal had been prepared but left uneaten. It was appreciated by the Royal Sussex.

A Thrilling Ride

While the 7th Brigade was enjoying itself in this satisfactory fashion, the 5th Brigade had again struck very heavy going. It had been a Stuka target all day and had bumped a number of rearguards. Now it was heading for Jovanni Berta and the Lamluda cross-roads. The South Africans were also on the way up and during the night relieved the 4/16th Punjabis, who swung away on a long night march with Jovanni Berta as their objective. After covering twenty miles the Punjabis came on a brisk action between the carrier squadron of the C.I.H. and an enemy of unknown strength, hidden among the rocks and bushes on the rounded hills between which the road wound. At dawn the Punjabis joined the cavalrymen and dashed at the position. They were greeted with withering fire. There was no opportunity to turn the flanks and the enemy refused to give ground. The advance was held up.

The 5th Brigade was also on the move before dawn. Part of the Brigade encountered a strong enemy position in the hills five miles south of Jovanni Berta. The 1/6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's), who had replaced the Buffs, moved across country and attacked



Wreckage on Derna aerodrome.

the position from the west. By the evening the battalion had succeeded in clearing most of the enemy, except for one small pocket.

In the meantime the 4th battalion of the regiment (Outram's) had been deputed to cut across country, get behind the Italians and seize the Lamluda cross-roads. The battalion, with a battery of the 1st Field Regiment, set off at noon, a series of cross-country compass bearings their only guide. Within a mile of leaving the road, the carriers in the lead encountered a strong and cleverly devised line of tank obstacles, which the natural difficulty of the terrain made almost impassable. But the line was undefended and the skirt of mines protecting it was found to be unfused. Outram's made gaps and wriggled through in single file. The country grew steadily more precipitous, with deep wadis and hillsides strewn with great boulders. It was impossible to advance in fighting formation, but carriers, trucks, guns and lorries alike, plunged through like elephants in underbrush; dropping into holes, perching on stones, smashing down shrubs, sometimes only just moving, but never quite held up. The heavy troop-carrying lorries rolled and pitched like small boats at sea; now tilted until it seemed certain that they must topple over, with the men inside hanging on or thrown into heaps inside; now climbing hills like the side of a house with the troops pushing behind; now down hill again, with the brakes hard on, slipping, skidding, slithering, over ground that had never seen a wheel before. At Abbiar Hadd piquets of the Central India Horse rubbed their eyes to see this lumbering cavalcade come over the ridge out of nowhere. They gave welcome news—the main road was less than a mile away. At 4.40 p.m. the leading company crashed out of the scrub onto the southern main road, three miles from the crossroads, and raced for the vital junction.

A long column of enemy transport was passing the cross-roads, westward bound, when Outram's Rifles flashed down upon them. Pandemonium reigned. For half an hour a tangle of vehicles, objurgating and weeping Italians, grinning and shouting Indians, completely blocked the road. When they were sorted out, the vehicles parked and the prisoners herded into a large building, less than an hour's light remained. The Rajputana Rifles set to work furiously. Road blocks were built on all four roads, a few hundred yards to the north, south, east and west of the cross-roads. Anti-tank guns were moved into the scrub to cover the road blocks and the 25-pounders were sited to fire towards Jovanni Berta, where the 4/16th Punjabis were still held up and being relieved by the 3/1st Punjabis.

At 9 p.m. transport could be heard approaching the eastern road block from the direction of Derna. A burst of furious firing, and a stream of lorries headed by a heavy tank crashed through the road block and raced for the cross-roads. The anti-tank guns could not be brought to bear, but Indian riflemen, swarming onto the road, sprang on the running boards, slew the drivers or took their surrender. The tank made good its escape, but the remainder of the convoy was rounded up. At dawn the dense bush was beaten for enemies who might have slipped away in the darkness. Dozens of Italians were taken from covert. By noon on December 20, the Rajputana Rifles held six hundred and fifty prisoners and the Derna bolt holes had been stopped at the cost of one British officer killed and four Indian other ranks wounded.

This wild ride made Outram's the toast of the Division for a week to come. A. C.I.H. officer, in a private letter, wrote:—"The Raj Rif drivers could qualify for any mountaineering club in the world." But Colonel Lawrenson of Outram's was quick to ensure

that credit was also given to the gunners and to the drivers of 309 G.T. Company, R.A.S.C. These British drivers had got the fighting men to the scene of action by magnificent driving.

On to Benghazi

On the morning of December 19, the 4/11th Sikhs, disdaining the rather ineffective demolitions on the switchback road down the escarpment, pushed into Derna and took possession. The townsmen received the bearded Indians nonchalantly. The street Arabs crowded round with pouches of eggs, demanding pounds but quite willing to accept spoonfuls of tea in payment. The Union Jack went up over the tiled and chromium-plated bank that had served as German headquarters. Patrols pushed through the town and along the coast road to shepherd stragglers into the Rajputana trap at Lamluda.

By midday on December 20 the district was clear of the enemy, except for a stand south of Jovanni Berta. Here a stubborn handful of infantry and gunners kept the 3/1st Punjabis at bay all day. When night fell the pockets of resistance had been pinpointed. A sudden rush with the bayonet put an end to a gallant resistance. One hundred and ten prisoners were brought in and forty dead left on the ground. The road to Barce was open.

The 5th Brigade and the Central India Horse now took up the pursuit, leaving the 7th Brigade to clear up Derna. They had a busy time restoring order, since the Arabs (and the Italian colonists in some instances) had begun to pay off old scores. There were many stragglers to be rounded up and much salvage work to be undertaken. In one workshop thirty-five tanks were found under repair, while another twenty were picked up undamaged along the roads, having been abandoned for lack of fuel.

A new enemy now began to give more trouble than the Italian rearguards. The heavy winter rains set in and vehicles which slipped off the tarmac were bogged. Had the enemy been in any shape to make resistance, progress would have been difficult as both the roads to Barce abound in narrow defiles, sharp curves and deep wadis, which simple demolitions would have rendered impassable. Fortunately the sudden appearance of the 5th Brigade at Lamluda seems to have stampeded the remnants of the 21st Corps. Only occasional road blocks and rearguards were encountered thereafter.

Water restrictions had now been removed. All through the campaign the ration had been half a gallon per day. Even in cold weather this left none for washing and not more than enough for drinking and cooking. To make conditions more pleasant, billets were also available. After eight months with the sky as their only roof, the C.I.H. at last got under cover, while Wellesley's Rifles were quartered in buildings for the first time since leaving India in the summer of 1939.

The 5th Brigade pushed forward, fighting frequent little actions, repairing roads and moving with speed under abominably wet and cold conditions. All were tired for they had been fighting, working and moving continuously since the beginning of the month. But resistance was never serious, the Italians bolting at top speed, leaving tanks, lorries and dumps to be collected by the British at leisure.

Barce was occupied by 4 p.m. on December 22. The town was undefended and the Mayor surrendered his keys with obvious relief. The extensive Italian settlements to the north and west were in a state of siege, with Arab bands looting and murdering. The town was immediately placed under martial law and a curfew imposed. The Italian police were allowed to



Derna.

keep their arms. Detachments were pushed out north, west and south to round up stragglers, take possession of dumps and restore order.

The last lap of fifty miles to Benghazi presented special difficulties. On the northern road the thickly populated Baracca district was beset by marauders and it was necessary to leave security detachments. Tobra Pass, where the road drops suddenly over the escarpment into the coastal plain, had been effectively demolished. The southern main road was not tarmac throughout its length and so was impassable in the rains for any but the lightest columns. One squadron of the C.I.H. was sent on to Benghazi by way of El Abiar. At 6 p.m. on December 24 patrols of the regiment entered the town, and on Christmas morning General Messervy received an intriguing message:—"C.I.H. patrols reached Benghazi 1800 hours yesterday. Dancing girls arrived three hours previously." The "dancing girls" were neither an E.N.S.A. pantomime nor those official entertainers whom only the Long Range Desert Group have had the luck to capture. They were stalwarts of the King's Dragoon Guards, who had ridden in from the south. One detects a certain frustration and acerbity in that signal.

Huge dumps of engineering stores and ammunition were discovered to the south and east of the town. Many tanks and some hundreds of abandoned vehicles were counted along the Barce-Benghazi road. One patrol reported a mile and a half of petrol drums. It turned out to be considerably less than this, but was nonetheless an important capture of fuel. A large dump of enemy tinned food, wines and bottled waters gave many officers and men an unexpected Christmas dinner. But, best of all, a number of prisoners of war were recovered, who brought news of others who had been missing. All in all, Christmas provided a cheerful day, not only in Benghazi, but for all the 4th Division,

strung out over a distance of 150 miles. Every detachment made merry in its own fashion. Most units were able to get under cover and to supplement their rations with local provisions. The bickering between Arabs and colonists was ending and far to the south the enemy had taken refuge at Jedabya. The future looked rosy.

The 7th Brigade now moved forward and took over from Barce to Benghazi, leaving the remainder of the Jebel to the 5th Brigade. The C.I.H. provided an advanced screen on the line Ghemimes-Soluch. The weather remained atrocious, cold and wet with the temperature nearly down to freezing point. It was the first experience of a European winter for many of the Indian soldiers and they found it unpleasant. It reminded the British of home, but that made them like it none the better.

The conquest of the Jebel therefore ended with the calendar year, and completed for the Indian Divisions in the Middle East twelve months of bitter fighting and continuous success. During 1941, operations in the North African Desert, the Sudan, Eritrea, Abyssinia and Syria had won for the 4th and 5th Indian Divisions high rank among the soldiers of the Empire. Everywhere their deeds were known; everywhere their courage and fighting craft were praised. They had struck heavy blows. The "game book" of the 4th Indian Division alone, since November 22, recorded over 6,000 prisoners taken, twenty-seven aircraft shot down and fifty-one German tanks of the heaviest types destroyed in action. And these totals took no notice of tanks damaged or aircraft captured during the pursuit.

The Division had paid the price of victory unflinchingly. During this six weeks' campaign, 178 officers and 2,455 other ranks were killed, wounded or missing. The Division had fought side by side with



Major-General F. I. S. Tucker, C B , D.S O , O.B.E., commanding the 4th
Indian Division, with his Pathan driver, Havildar Mohammad Yusuf.

the tough British, New Zealand, South African and Australian formations. They had shown the world what a formidable combination British and Indians can be.

The 4th Indian Division faced the New Year under a new commander. Major-General F. W. Messervy, D.S.O., had been selected to command an Indian Armoured Division, but actually took over the 1st British Armoured Division. Major-General F. I. S. Taker arrived to relieve him and took over command on New Year's Day.

The year died with the Division scattered along the rain-sodden Jebel ridges, in control of a terrain isolated and difficult to defend. Out of the south came ominous sounds. Near Antelat on December 28-30 Rommel's panzers had struck back viciously. The curtain promised to rise soon upon another scene.

EIGHT

Desert Adventure

THE story of the part played in the capture of Jalo oasis by Indian troops will be told in detail, not so much because of the importance of the operation as because the experiences of the 2nd Punjab Regiment (Lieut.-Colonel F. A. M. B. Jenkins, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.) are typical of the adventures of many other units, whose exploits, with the Long Range Desert Group in "Jockcols," columns named after General Jock Campbell, V.C., or on roving commission, cannot be recounted within the compass of this book. Later, when all can be told, many other books will tell the stories of British "bedouin" forces, and the battles they fought in the depths of the desert. For the present this single example must suffice.

All through the autumn a large dumping programme had been carried out, ready for offensive operations in the winter. The 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, which had already shown itself to be a most formidable fighting formation at Barentu, Keren and, in particular, at Amba Alagi, now held Jarabub and Siwa.

As part of the November offensive, it was decided to seize Jalo, which would prove a valuable operational base if the Libyan battle went well. A composite force



*Brigadier W.H.B. Mirless, D.S.O., M.C., Commander of the Royal Artillery
of the 4th Indian Division.*

was made up under the command of Brigadier D. V. Reid, D.S.O., M.C. (formerly 5th Mahratta Light Infantry) and was given the name of "E" Force. It consisted of the following :—

2nd Punjab Regiment.

6th South African Armoured Car Regiment.

7th South African Reconnaissance Battalion.

A Battery of South African Field Regiment.

A British Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

One section of 21st Field Company, Indian Sappers
and Miners.

On November 18 the column moved out of Jarabub, following a previously reconnoitred route to the north-west. For three days steady progress was made over firm going and without molestation. The movement was discovered, however, by the enemy on November 20. From then onwards difficulties began.

At noon on November 21, "E" Force came to a deep wadi, with high soft banks and a shifting treacherous bottom. The Brigadier sent one section of light A.A. guns first to try the passage, and after great difficulty, it managed to mount the far side. This was most fortunate, for a close watch had apparently been kept from the air. No sooner had the columns become involved in this difficult crossing than ME 110s came streaking out of the west, flying low and carrying bombs. They swooped on the wadi at a height of fifty feet. Their intention was to block it, and, but for the heavy and accurate fire of the A.A. guns which had been extricated, they might have succeeded. As it was, they were driven off the wadi and concentrated their attention on the transport column in rear, inflicting casualties. Herculean labours followed, and eventually the 25-pounders were tugged across the wadi. The column re-formed, and continued its march. Within an hour Italian bombers were overhead. The bombing was so well concentrated that the column was

obliged to halt and to disperse while the Ack-Ack gunners drove off the 'planes. Some twelve more vehicles were hit in this encounter.

The attack on Jalo had been planned from the north-west of the oases, in order to prevent the escape of the garrison. "E" Force camped thirty miles from the nearest oasis on the night of December 21. Next morning two columns went out to deal with the "sentinel" oases. Lieut.-Colonel V. C. G. Short, a former Indian Army officer now commanding the 6th S.A. Armoured Car Regiment, moved on Angila; Lieut.-Colonel P. H. Grobelaar (7th S. A. Reconnaissance Battalion) was allotted Jakheira. Both columns included a company of the 2nd Punjabis, and a number of the field, Ack-Ack and anti-tank guns.

Colonel Short's column made short work of Angila. A little fort overlooking bare sand on three sides, and a small village in a depression to the south. The first armoured car to arrive tried to take the fort single-handed. A number of guns opened, and the car was knocked out, all the occupants being killed. As soon as the other armoured cars deployed, the fort surrendered without further firing. Fifty prisoners and several guns were taken.

Lieut.-Colonel Grobelaar's column found extremely hard going on the way to Jakheira. The armoured cars were constantly sinking into the sand. With sand channels under the wheels, they could pull out; but if the car stopped to pick up the crew and channels, it immediately sank again. The crew had to grab the heavy channels and race after the cars, hurling themselves on board, only to find the cars sinking under their weight. The trucks carrying the infantry were a little better off, but many of these became hopelessly bogged. When they had dug themselves out, the main column sometimes had disappeared. Several lorries wandered off the bearing and were lost. The guns

could only make a few yards at a time, and the gunners, stripped to the waist in the icy air, were bathed in perspiration. Italian bombers came over and thoroughly plastered the bogged vehicles. Only two lorries, however, were hit. From the pilot of a plane shot down it was discovered that orders had been given to keep the various columns under attack throughout the hours of daylight.

When the head of the column reached the outskirts of Jakheira at 3.30 p.m. many vehicles and all the guns had been left behind. Armoured cars went forward to reconnoitre, and ran into a nest of Bredas, well dug in behind a series of stone sangars. These guns opened at close range, knocking out three armoured cars. Colonel Grobelaar then ordered the Punjabis (the Dogra Company) to storm the oasis. Led by Lieutenant B. R. Pearson, the Dogras squirmed through the low scrub to within one hundred yards of the Italian position before they were spotted. Heavy fire was opened by 20 mm. and 47 mm. Bredas, which pinned the attack to the ground. When darkness fell the Indians had pinpointed the Italian positions and withdrew. It was hoped that guns would arrive during the night, but when morning broke, and no guns were in sight, the infantry were again ordered to rush the position. Part of the Dogras under Lieutenant Pearson worked through the scrub, the remainder under Subedar Sher Singh, made a long detour to come upon the enemy's rear. But while this attack was organising, the section of the anti-aircraft battery which had served so well at the wadi, suddenly appeared over the crest of a dune a thousand yards away. Before the Italians could swing their Bredas onto the audacious gunners, a clip of Bofors shells smashed into the principal sangar. The Italians scurried for safety into a strong point further back, and on their heels raced Pearson and his Dogras. A few grenades brought out the garrison. Fifty prisoners and the oasis were taken.

The remainder of "E" Force, having been apprised of Colonel Short's success, moved up to Angila. The two portions of the little force which deserve special mention for this strenuous and much bombed journey were the L. A. A. Battery and the R.I.A.S.C. The Ack-Ack gunners were the only defence against the many air attacks, and it was largely due to their accurate shooting that much greater casualties were not incurred. The attacks were normally concentrated on the transport tail, and it suffered the majority of casualties. The R.I.A.S.C. drivers stuck to their job throughout all the unpleasantness and without their devoted work the column might never have reached the oases—lost in the desert and never heard of again.

From here we cannot do better than quote from the report of Captain M. L. Katju, M.C., Indian Army Observer :—

" November 23 was spent at Angila in preparation for the attack on El Ergh which, it was now learnt, was held more strongly than anticipated. In the afternoon, Brigadier Reid with other unit commanders went on a reconnaissance of El Ergh. Little information had been available about these oases. The going was found to be very good without a trace of scrub except in the vicinity of the oasis. In spite of this lack of cover, the reconnaissance party approached without challenge in full view of the fort which could be seen on a bit of high ground in the middle of the oasis.

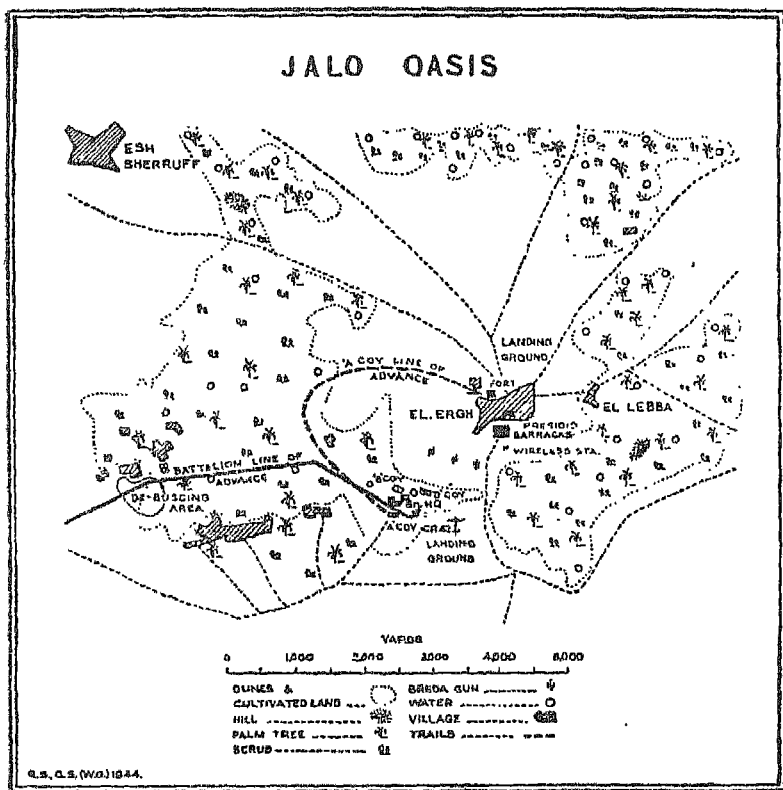
" As a result of this reconnaissance it was decided that El Ergh was to be attacked from the south-west. A night march was to be made with the attacking troops arriving at the edge of the oasis at first light. The 2nd Punjabis were to bear the brunt of the attack as the nature of the country around the oasis, with its scrub and soft sand, precluded the use of armoured cars. 'B' Company (Captain F. N. Betts) and 'D' Company (Captain D. Millman) were to go

through the scrub towards the fort from the south-west. One squadron of the 6th S.A.A.C. Regiment with 'A' Company (Major W. V. S. Leatherdale) was to attack from the south. The 7th S.A. Reconnaissance Battalion was given the task of clearing out the scrub while Lieut.-Colonel Grobelaar, marching from Jakheira, was to demonstrate from the east. The South African Field Regiment was to go into action from the high ground overlooking El Ergh from the south-west.

"After an early supper, the force began to move out unit by unit to the area where it was to form up for the advance. A carefully shrouded hurricane lantern and dim tail lamps of vehicles guided each unit to its place. By 1 a.m. on November 24 the force was in position for the advance. It was too early to start, and many of the men, tired with a day of strain, fell asleep. It was freezing cold and many of the drivers, who had to keep awake, were walking and hopping about to prevent themselves getting numbed.

"Two hours slipped by. At 3 a.m. the signal was given to advance. Engines revved, there was a little shouting, some cars had to be pushed to get them started, and then we were off. It was a nerve-wracking march in spite of the fact that the going was the best we had met so far. The moon had gone to bed, and the brilliant starlit sky gave a most inadequate light which was extremely deceptive. Vehicles moved with fifteen yards distance between them, but even at that interval they seemed to merge into the darkness. We were going so slowly that we had to use bottom gear, yet the slightest increase of pace gave rise to the impression that all the cars in front were moving backwards. As one hastily applied the brakes, the cars seemed to disappear into the night. The noise of our approach was colossal and the enemy must have thought a regiment of tanks was coming up. In

fact the enemy did think that we had tanks with us for when we were first bombed, the German radio triumphantly claimed the destruction of one hundred tanks and vehicles.



“ Even nightmares have an ending, and just after six o'clock in the morning, while it was still dark, we reached the assembly area after covering about thirteen miles. Dim and far away, a darker blotch on the darkness, lay the scrub through which we were to advance. The armoured cars and Major Leatherdale's company continued straight on for three miles from the assembly point and then turned left to go into the scrub. 'B,' 'D' and Headquarter Companies of the

Punjabis turned half left from the assembly point and after three miles, came to scrub through which the vehicles could not progress. The men debussed and advanced on foot. By this time there was light enough to see about one hundred yards.

"The rising sun found the Punjabis going through the scrub and small cultivated plots in which grew radishes and pumpkins. The men were merry as if on a picnic. It was a long time since they had seen so much greenery. Now and then a man would stop to pluck out a radish and chew it. From their huts, the Arabs watched, apparently indifferent, but in reality anxious to be on the winning side, preferably ours, for there is little love lost between the Senussis and the Italians. Later during the day and in the middle of the battle, they walked about in front of our line, quite confident that they would not be shot at. Every now and then, while bullets flew over and around us, little Arab boys would spring up from nowhere offering us eggs. The currency was tea and sugar. The Arabs had no use for money.

"At about 7 a.m. came the first burst of machine-gun fire followed by a column of black smoke. It was the armoured cars shooting up a C.R. 42 (Italian fighter aircraft) on the ground. Then firing became more frequent.

"Two 75-mm. guns opened at us from the fort at about 7.15 a.m. The first shell landed at the fringe of the scrub, the only casualty being a camera carried by an Indian Army photographer, who was photographing the armoured carriers knocking down the barbed wire fence under fire. Then the guns ranged on to the higher ground where 'E' Force headquarters were located. Our guns returned the fire. The 75-mms. did no damage at all.

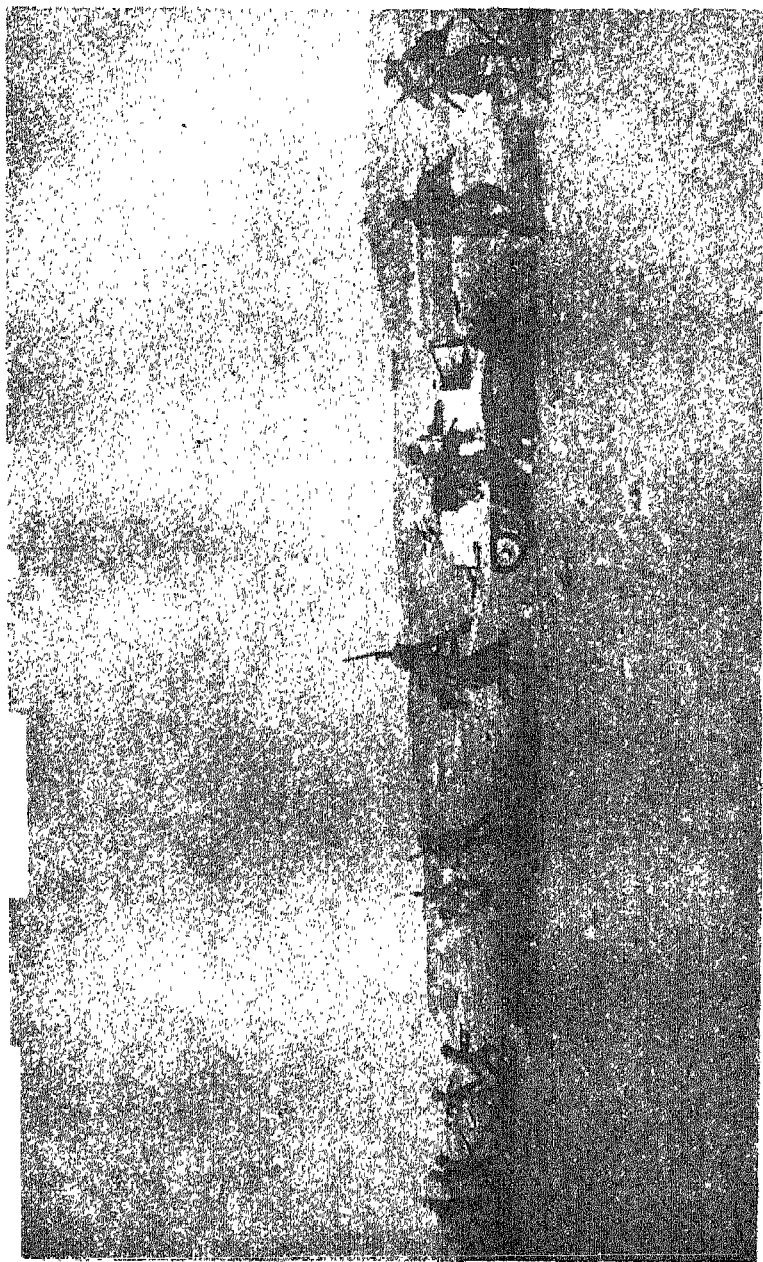
"The approach to the fort was longer than we had anticipated during the previous day's reconnais-

sance. After more than an hour's advance the scrub began to thin out and Lieut.-Colonel Jenkins went forward to recce a more covered approach to the enemy. Soon afterwards Force Headquarters and our gun positions were attacked by one Savoia and seven C.R. 42s. Scarcely had these planes dropped their first bombs than two Hurricanes streaked out of the sun after them. It was amazing to see how quickly the enemy hit it for home, followed by the Hurricanes. The battle had stopped in the meantime for everyone was watching the sky. As the enemy planes scurried, loud cheering burst from the Punjabis which redoubled when the Savoia followed by two C.R. 42s crashed to the ground. This was the first time they had seen their own planes on this front, and they grew arrogant over the R.A.F. performance. They had no false modesty regarding the result of the battle for El Ergh, and all they asked was no interference from the air.

"As the planes disappeared, the battle began again. The Punjabis resumed their advance, and the Arabs came forward with dates for the officers.

" 'D' Company soon after bumped the first enemy position. The Italians had a 20-mm. anti-aircraft Breda on a small mound. It fired 120 rounds of small explosive bullets per minute and was a deadly weapon. Two other Bredas were located in similar positions and there were 47-mm. Bredas behind. The advance was held up.

"The capture of these strong-points was essential if the advance was to be continued. It was no easy task. The infantry would have to advance at least seven hundred yards across completely bare country. A 3-inch mortar was brought up behind a little knoll. Bredas opened fire on this position, the explosive bullets mowing the rushes on top of the sandbank and sometimes penetrating the sand. The mortar dropped



The capture of Jalo. Indian infantry charge forward through Breda and machine-gun fire.

bombs close to one of the strong-points, but a direct hit was necessary to put the Bredas out of action. The gun continued to fire.

“ A platoon of ‘ D ’ Company tried to rush one of the strong-points, but were pinned down.

“ The 25-pounders were then called upon. They dropped shells all round the strong-points but failed to score direct hits. The artillerymen complained that every time they fired their guns, the trails sank in the sand and impaired their accuracy.

“ This deadlock continued for some time, with intermittent exchanges of fire between our Bren-guns and the Bredas. Some of the men dozed off in the genial warmth of the sun ; others prepared tea, watched by envious Arabs. At about 1 p.m., Brigadier Reid came to see for himself. He was warmly welcomed by one of the Bredas. After a thorough inspection, he came to the conclusion that the Italians could not be shifted from their strong-points by small arms fire, and that troops could not attack over the open ground by day. The use of the armoured cars was out of the question, for they could not get through the soft sand. Moreover, they would provide easy and vulnerable targets for the lighter Bredas.

“ It was decided that artillery should harass the enemy all day. As soon as darkness fell, ‘ D ’ Company, under cover of a larrage, was to attack the strong-points while ‘ A ’ Company, moving round on the left flank, was to make for the fort.

“ The rest of the day was unexciting except for one episode. During the afternoon, the anti-tank guns decided to have a go at the obstinate Bredas. Major Allan, with great daring and skill, brought up a gun to within 750 yards of one of the strong-points. With its third shot, the 2-pounder hit the barrel of the Breda and that gun gave no further trouble.

"The evening was spent in rearranging the infantry positions, setting up a dressing station for casualties, and cooking and eating a hasty meal in preparation for the night attack at 7.30 p.m. Sixty sappers were held in reserve in case of counter-attack. Bangalore torpedoes had been prepared in case wire was encountered.

"At 7.23 p.m. the shoot came down on the two remaining strong-points. The Bredas stuttered and spluttered, firing furiously, desperately seeking a longer lease of life. Tracer cut lanes through the darkness, sparkled among the tree tops, wrought havoc in the garden plots, slid and skipped and leaped above the oasis. At 7.35 p.m., with shouts of '*Ya Ali*,' two platoons of 'D' Company rushed the strong-points.

"No. 17 platoon took its knoll without any opposition. No. 18 platoon, led by 2nd-Lieutenant Holden, rushed forward close behind the barrage and took its objective with the bayonet. Two Italians were killed and five captured. The platoon had one man wounded by a hand grenade, but this was the only casualty.

"The Punjabis were jubilant, and in the night they saw a strange thing—their young commander dancing a wild dervish dance of victory on the parapet of the gun position.

"The Italians, when they surrendered, furiously gestured towards their throats and shook their heads as if imploring the officer to save their throats from being cut. Apparently Indian troops had the reputation among the Italians, of preferring not to take prisoners. One explanation was that this reputation gained currency during the time the 18th Cavalry held a sector of the Tobruk defences. In their nightly prowls, in order to avoid noise, the cavalrymen sometimes slit the throats of sentries.

"The Italian commander afterwards inquired of Brigadier Reid why the Indians shouted just before they attacked, especially in a night attack where the element of surprise was essential. The Brigadier referred the question to a subedar who replied, without a blush, that the Indians shouted to warn their enemies that they were coming, lest they afterwards excused their defeat by saying that they were taken by surprise and could not fight their best. Later, the subedar offered his true explanation. He said that their Eritrean experiences had convinced them that the Italians gave in easily when they heard the Indian's war-cry. The more savage the shouts, the more easily did the Italians surrender.

"Actually, the Italians had fought well. They had held up the advance for several hours and had stuck to their posts in spite of the knowledge that their position was hopeless. They could expect no aid and their officers had left them early on, with the instruction to carry on to the last man and the last round.

"Meanwhile the battle had shifted to the fort. At 7.45 p.m. loud cheering announced that 'A' Company was attacking, and about ten minutes later a green very light soared, the signal of success. Then all was silent. No messages arrived and the situation remained obscure.

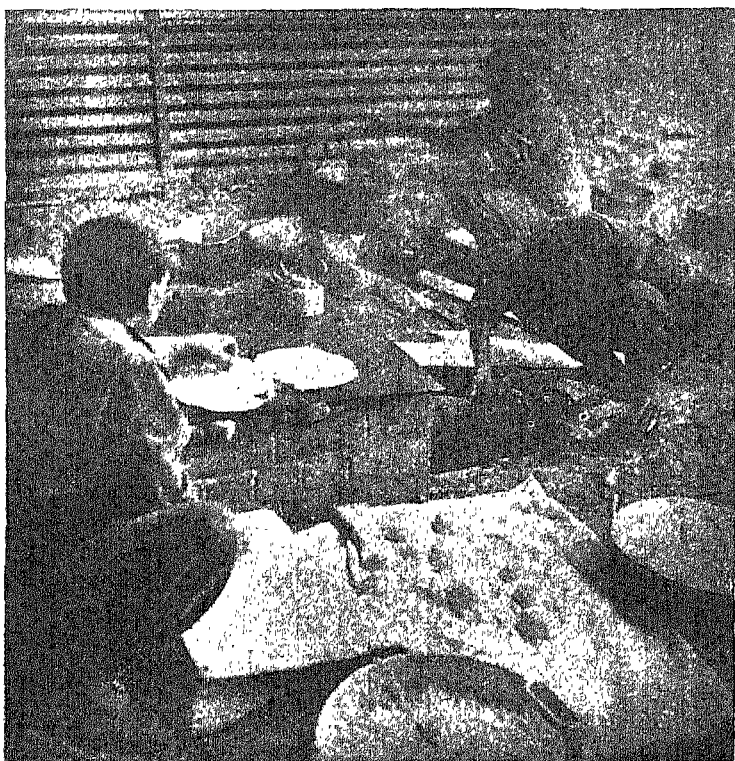
"At 8.30 p.m. Brigadier Reid arrived at the Punjabis' Headquarters. It was decided to go forward to the fort, and see if it had been captured. Brigadier Reid and Colonel Jenkins squeezed into a bantam liaison car driven by Captain D. Trout, M.C. With headlights flashing they drove up the main street (by courtesy) of El Ergh, to the fort where they were greeted by Major Leatherdale brandishing a Tommy-gun and a signal lamp. From him they learnt that our men had followed up quickly behind the shells. Enemy resistance had been quashed easily.

"Brigadier Reid now decided to visit the 'Presidio,' which had been reported to be a sort of rest house. Taking an Italian prisoner as guide, the Brigadier with four other officers and two sepoy as escort, set off through the village. The 'Presidio' was about two hundred yards from the fort. On arriving outside the main gate, a sentry was encountered and ordered to put up his hands. Magnificently ignorant of the evening's happenings, he laughed. Lieut.-Colonel Jenkins' revolver cut his merriment short. Opening the door, a hum of voices could be heard in the darkness. A short passage led on to a courtyard with several rooms opening off it.

"Four Italians were dragged out of the passage. Then Lieut.-Colonel Jenkins, with his revolver at the ready, shouted into the darkness of the courtyard bidding the Italians to come out and surrender. His tone said what his words may have failed to make clear. Every nook and corner belched Italians, until six officers and seventy-six other ranks stood shivering in the courtyard waiting to be disarmed. Several of them still clung to their bottles of chianti, from which in some cases they had been imbibing a little freely. One officer fell to weeping bitterly and another officer came up to him, kissed him on both cheeks, mingled his own tears with his friends—and all was well again.

"During the night a curious and significant incident occurred. The prisoners were put into the schoolroom for the night. This room contained a double portrait of the King of Italy and Mussolini hanging on the wall. In the morning, the Duce's portrait was found on the ground. It had been stamped on by some of the prisoners.

"The main enemy resistance had been broken and no further operations were undertaken that night. The men went to sleep, weary and grateful, sure that the morning's task would be easy. And so it was. One



Cooking *chapattis*.

after another, the remaining Italian outposts surrendered. One Italian fired after putting up a white flag. He was duly dealt with.

“ The only fighting took place in El Lebba area, which was being cleared out by the 6th S.A.A.C. Regiment. Here the armoured cars stuck in the sand, and two were knocked out, with casualties. Seeing the cars to be useless, Lieut.-Colonel Short called on his men to attack on foot. Grabbing whatever weapons came to hand, even faulty rifles, spanners and hammers, this curious infantry attacked and captured the last centre of resistance. It was an extremely daring operation. At one point, while his comrades had raised their hands, an Italian grabbed a grenade and started to take out the pin. With his revolver covering the Italian, Lieut.-Colonel Short felt sympathy for a man who fought on. He ducked the grenade, which exploded harmlessly. He was beginning to think he would have to shoot, when the Italian surrendered.

“ By 4 p.m. on November 25 all resistance was at an end. Twenty-one officers and six hundred and fifty other ranks had been taken prisoner. The war material captured included two 75-mm., ten 47-mm. and a large number of 20-mm. Breda guns. The Punjabis casualties both in battle and from bombing were six killed and seventeen wounded.”

“ E ” Force moved into El Ergh oasis and reorganised. It was a pleasant spot, with a fair food supply and friendly inhabitants. The Senussis loathed the Italians and looked upon the column as deliverers. As evidence of cruelty they exhibited a Senussi who had been blinded by the Italians. Numerous instances of torture were alleged. Their tales were probably exaggerated, and the Senussis are not tractable subjects. Nevertheless, there was evidence of injustice and ill-treatment.

El Ergh revealed "E" Force to be practically immobilised. There was little petrol left and rations depended largely on local purchases. The first few days were spent in endeavouring to collect Italian supplies. Considerable quantities of Italian rations should have been available, but before the dumps could be guarded, the Senussis had looted them, and had hidden all provisions underground. Troops and prisoners alike were put on half rations, which were supplemented by local eggs and vegetables. British, Egyptian and Italian currency was useless. All barter was conducted on a basis of tea. Tea constituted the only legal tender, and the only limit to purchase of foodstuffs was the amount of tea available.

When rations were cut, the Italian Commander protested volubly, and demanded better treatment. He would not believe that the British troops paid for everything, and that they were living on exactly the same rations as their prisoners. This officer felt that fate had treated him scurvily. He had spent most of the last war in a German prison, and now he was a British prisoner at an early stage in the campaign.

Days passed into weeks. "E" Force felt that they had been forgotten in Jalo. The Eighth Army was demanding reconnaissance parties and harassing operations, but was sending mere dribblets of petrol and of food. Nevertheless a number of columns were out during December to raid enemy lines of communication south of Jedabya. Some small parties even penetrated well into Tripolitania. On December 20 substantial supplies of rations and petrol arrived in Jalo by air. "E" Force was itself again. A strong British column was striking across the desert to the south of Msus, and "E" Force was given the role of keeping its southern flank clear of raiders. On December 20, therefore, Colonel Short led his former column due north from Jalo to the east of Jedabya. The main column followed two days behind him.

On December 22 Colonel Short occupied Giof el Matar (The Well of Rainwater) and this became the new headquarters of "E" Force. When the main body arrived, Colonel Short's column turned to the west, and cut the Antelat-Jedabya trail. Thereafter two other columns under Lieutenant Holden and Captain Millman hunted along the road to Agheila. For nearly a fortnight "E" Force remained in this neighbourhood, cutting up convoys on their retreat from the Jebel. On January 6 the enemy evacuated Jedabya, British columns were arriving in strength, and "E" Force had scarcely a sound tyre or engine. On January 15 the 6th South African Armoured Car Regiment was withdrawn to refit, and an order was issued for the remainder of "E" Force to come in. Two months of rough and ready campaigning in the depth of the desert, however, was not to end by unmolested withdrawal. On January 21 the German counter-offensive began, and "E" Force, shepherded north by the advancing enemy armour, found itself fighting a desperate rearguard, together with the 4th Indian Division. Their participation in this action will be recounted in another chapter.

NINE

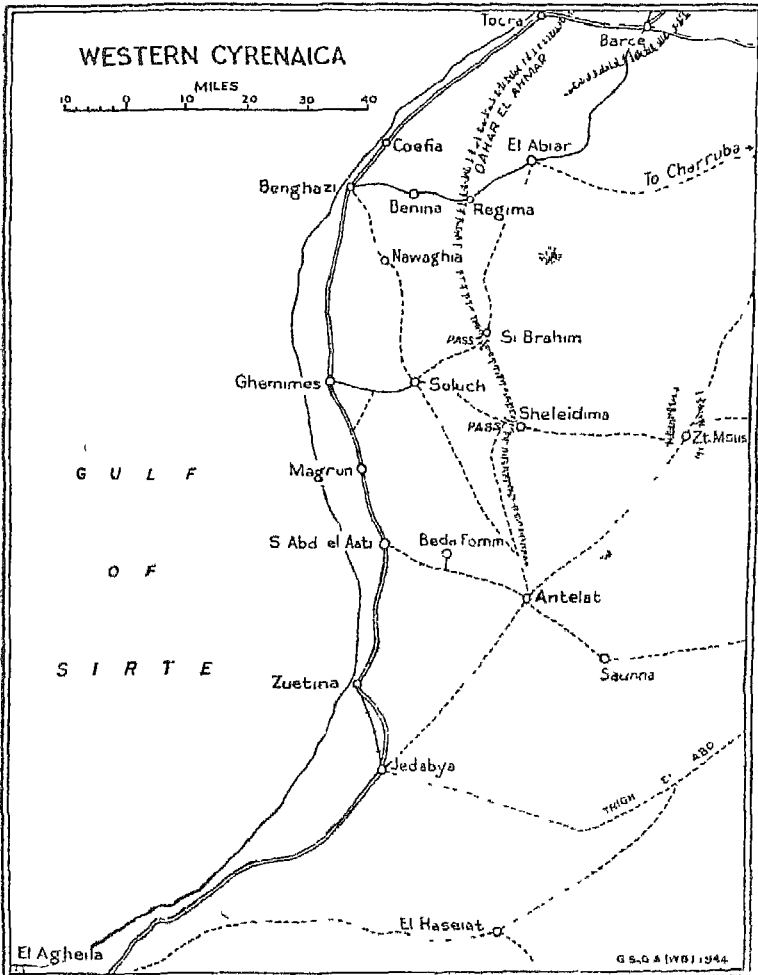
Rommel Strikes Back

THE New Year opened with the Eighth Army committed to the best of resolutions—to make an end of Rommel in his lair at the bottom of the Gulf of Sirte. Unfortunately, as in the case of so many good resolutions, desire outmarched capacity.

Since the start of the campaign in November, world strategy had suffered a complete upset. Japan had entered the war. Reinforcements intended for the 8th, 9th and 10th Armies of the Middle East were diverted to Malaya, Burma, Ceylon and India. To add to the difficulties, Australian troops were being hurried back to defend their homeland, while seasoned British Divisions and Brigades, both infantry and armoured, were being shipped to India and Burma from the Middle East. Eleven months previously General Wavell had been obliged to weaken his forces in Cyrenaica to meet dangers in other directions. Now General Auchinleck found himself in exactly the same straits.

Another serious problem was the shortage of equipment, particularly lorries. With the greatly extended lines of communication due to the advance, many thousands of lorries were required to supply the forces in Cyrenaica. Although a Division in India does not require as many vehicles as one in the desert,

it yet needs many hundreds, and so the demands of India were met at the expense of the Middle East. To ease the vehicle problem,* the railway was being



* Supply by lorry is a most complicated problem. In very simple terms it can be taken that for every fifty miles that a force advances the number of lorries required to keep it supplied with food, water, ammunition and petrol must be doubled.

extended and eventually reached nearly as far as Tobruk; but this was a project requiring several months before it could be completed. To keep the troops supplied and yet to keep them mobile was the chief concern of the staff of the Eighth Army and also of G.H.Q.

In Cyrenaica the situation was by no means easy. Rommel, after his riposte from Jedabya, had retired to El Agheila, the strongest position along the whole coast of Libya and Egypt. During the winter battles he had been defeated but not destroyed. He had lost many tanks, much equipment and huge quantities of stores. His casualties had been considerable, nearly forty thousand men being made prisoner when the frontier positions were finally reduced and their total added to the bag in the mobile warfare. But he had made his retirement to Jedabya in fair order. To turn him out of his position would be no simple task. Plans nevertheless went forward for an attack on the Axis position at El Agheila. It was hoped that the supply position, both with regard to the supplies themselves and also the vehicles to carry them, would be adequate to enable the attack to be launched in early February. The 4th Indian Division was earmarked for a prominent part in these operations.

In January the Axis positions at Bardia and Halfaya were being reduced by starvation, thirst, bombing and shelling. Only two Divisions were available to hold Western Cyrenaica. The 1st British Armoured Division was forming in the desert and the 4th Indian Division held the Jebel and the coastal plain south of Benghazi. Rommel was watched by mobile patrols and these were the only cover to the dumps being formed round Msus. As in all military operations, the ground decided the dispositions. In this area the deciding feature was the long, steep escarpment running south from the Dahar el Ahmar



"The railway was being extended."

ridges, east of Benghazi, to Antelat. Through this escarpment there were only two passes, at Sheleidima and Si Brahim. With the Armoured Division in the desert, any advance by Rommel up the coastal plain would be tactical suicide; for then the British armour would close in behind and the Axis forces would be trapped between the sea on the west, the escarpment on the east and the Indian Division in front. If, on the other hand, Rommel were to advance into the desert, the forces holding the coastal plain would be able to sally out and cut his communication south of Jedalya. But, were he to smash the Armoured Division in the desert, the tables would be completely turned. Then he could cross the desert, cut the roads in the Jebel and destroy the Indian Division at his leisure. If Rommel advanced from El Agheila, everything depended on the ability of the 1st Armoured Division to hold him—and this Division was weak, only just formed and hardly ready for battle.

Holding the Jebel

For operations at the beginning of 1942, the 4th Indian Division consisted only of headquarters and the 7th Brigade. Headquarters was in Barce, and this was the first time that Advanced and Rear H.Q. had been together since 1940. The 11th Brigade was still in Tobruk, waiting for transport. It was short of one battalion, the 1,6th Rajputana Rifles, which had moved down to Msus and Antelat for protective duties with 13th Corps Headquarters. The battered 5th Brigade was split up in the Derna area. The handful of Buffs remaining after the regiment's ordeal at Alem Hamza were replaced by the Welch Regiment. The 31st Punjab Regiment was relieved by the 1st battalion of the same regiment and returned to Tobruk.

Thus was the Division split up, but the disintegration went further. The artillery began to drain off into

the armoured formations. When the 1st Field Regiment, which had accompanied the 5th Brigade from India and had shared its fortunes and misfortunes in full measure, was removed, the divisional diarist felt impelled to speak his mind. Though these moves were necessary because of the broad plan, they were most unpopular with the Division. The 57th Light Anti-aircraft Regiment R.A. and the 65th Anti-tank Regiment R.A. remained. These two regiments never fought as a whole ; they were always split up as batteries or troops with different columns. Wherever they went they were admired, loved and trusted. An indication of how these gunners were regarded is given by a remark in a war diary for the El Alamein period. In this very official document the Adjutant of an Indian battalion had felt justified in allowing himself to say :—" We hear the 57th L.A.A. Regiment is coming back to the Division. At last ! NOW we shall see the Stukas brought down ! "

In the Derna area the 5th Brigade was having an interesting, if hardly warlike time. The problem of policing a wild country, inhabited by two races anxious to have a whack at each other, kept the troops well occupied. Looting and assaults had to be firmly stopped. There were many other jobs to do. Stragglers disguised as colonists had to be rounded up. On one occasion news came that a party of R.A.F. were held prisoner by a band of Italians in the thickly wooded areas on the coast near Cirene. A party from Outram's Rifles beat the woods and flushed out nearly a hundred Italians.

At last, on January 21, the Polish Brigade arrived and took over the chores of the neighbourhood. The 5th Brigade was free to move forward to more soldierly employment. It remained, however, more or less immobile as there were no lorries available to carry the troops.

Rommel Attacks

January 21 was a notable day for other reasons. The Axis forces sallied forth from El Agheila and drove the British patrols before them. By the morning of January 22 some three thousand motor vehicles, including a formidable number of tanks and guns, had passed Jedabya and were headed north-east for Antelat, a confluence of desert trails at the end of the escarpment. That evening Axis troops reached Antelat in force.

The Eighth Army believed that Rommel's sorties was only a demonstration in force, mounted with the object of interfering with British preparations for attack. The belief was probably correct. The Axis forces, however, were so successful in their encounters with the British armour that Rommel must have decided to exploit the victory to the full.

Headquarters of the 13th Corps withdrew from Antelat to Msus, forty-five miles to the north-east, leaving the ground clear for the armoured battle. No transport had, however, arrived to move Captain Mahbaksh Singh's company of the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles, performing protective duties with an Anti-aircraft Brigade. When transport did arrive, the enemy armour had cut the trails to the north. The Raj Rif left the tracks and detoured into the desert in an endeavour to escape. Unfortunately, the heavily laden lorries became bogged in the soft sand. In such helpless condition they were overrun by panzers and few escaped.

January 23 and 24 were fateful days for the Eighth Army. The 1st Armoured Division clashed with the main body of panzers and suffered grievous loss. In the meantime things had been happening with the 4th Indian Division.

The 7th Brigade took up positions along the minefields, running from the coast through Nawaghia,

some twelve miles south of Benghazi. The Welch arrived from the 5th Brigade to hold the passes at Si Brahim and Sheleidima and to provide a reserve in Benghazi. The Central India Horse with a few guns of the 31st Field Regiment pushed down the coastal corridor, to find out what was happening at its southern end. The 11th Brigade was ordered forward from Tobruk. Three field regiments of artillery and one anti-tank regiment were ordered to join the Division, and hurried forward through Jebel. The 8th Bn. Royal Tank Regiment came up to join the 7th Brigade. The Division promised to be back nearly at full strength in a few days. After three weeks' rest from fighting the 4th Indian Division shook itself and prepared to take the field again.

In these days the Central India Horse and the guns of the 31st Field had good hunting on the fringes of the German lines of communication. The columns ambushed convoys, shot up lorries, burnt a Stuka on the ground and captured a number of vehicles and men. Little information could be got from the prisoners except surprise and indignation, for the presence of the guns and cavalry did not accord with the German plan.

One column, with a few guns of the 57th Light A.A. Regiment, had a glorious three minutes on January 24. Four Stukas dived on them, but the gunners of the 57th were, as ever, well on the mark. The first Stuka was shot down before it could release its bombs; the second was got at the bottom of its dive as it released them; the third was hit as it turned away. The fourth thought, rightly, that discretion was the better part of valour and made off without making its attack. The Central India Horse maintained that they had some share in the bag of three out of four, for one of the pilots had a bullet wound in the shoulder, and in order to substantiate the claim, the gunners were brought over to see for themselves.

Much of the work of the columns consisted in watching the enemy in his own territory. Lance-Daffadar Attar Singh, with two trucks, was given the job of finding out what was happening round Antelat. Early in the morning he found a large concentration of Germans below the hills where they fade away round that place. One truck he at once sent off with the news, while from the other he proceeded to keep tabs on the enemy. All that day he shadowed the hostile force until the Germans, annoyed at the persistence of this solitary truck, sent out two armoured cars to deal with it. Attar Singh scuttled away, slipped out of sight behind the hill, doubled back, and in next to no time was watching the enemy once again. Like an angry man trying to brush away a fly, the Germans opened up with artillery; but like the fly the lance-daffadar dodged in and out, always keeping the enemy in view. Several times his truck was holed by bullets when he came within small arms range. During the day he intercepted several stray British lorries and sent them back to safety, each carrying a message to column headquarters telling what was happening. Alone and unsupported he continued his watch until dark.

The plan now was that the 4th Division should occupy a series of posts on a line roughly east and west through Beda Fomm.* This would provide a useful sally port, and would also give Rommel furiously to think if he failed to deal finally with the 1st Division. Plans were in train for this advance when, suddenly at 12.25 p.m. on January 25, word came from the

*Beda Fomm was the site of the last battle of the campaign of 1940 41. After the fall of Derna, Lieut-General Sir Richard O'Connor took the 7th Armoured Division across the desert by way of Mekeh and Antelat and cut the retreat of Bergonzoli's army from Benghazi. The first squadron of tanks arrived just in time to halt the enemy and fought a most desperate action. As that day and the next wore on, more and more of the tanks, guns and infantry of the Division arrived, until the Italians massed on the main road were in a position to be massacred and had to surrender. It was a fitting climax to that daring campaign

Armoured Division that Msus could no longer be held.

This altered the situation entirely. The value of the escarpment as a defensive flank was nullified and soon the German armour would come flooding across the Dahar el Ahmar ridges into Benghazi. There was no alternative but to withdraw. Orders were accordingly given; the possibility had been foreseen and plans made accordingly. On the afternoon of January 25 the retreat began. Administrative units went first. The N.A.A.F.I. issued all its stocks, including beer, free to the first comers and good quartermasters joined their units that night with welcome loads.

In the desert things were happening. The 1st Armoured Division disengaged from the enemy and rallied at Charruba, thirty-five miles south-east of Barce. The 4th Division had a stake in the desert battle in the shape of the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles, although they were not at the time under Divisional Command. A patrol of the C.I.H. went out by way of the Sheleidima Pass to ascertain their fate. It encountered heavy enemy forces and it was feared that the remainder of this fine battalion had shared the fate of its company at Antelat. Fortunately that was not the case. There was no troop-carrying transport, the armoured regiments were retiring and the enemy were all around Wellesley's Rifles, hiding in a wadi. Lieutenant Mehbub Singh, the battalion transport officer, went off to draw petrol, and filled up completely while the enemy were doing the same at the other end of the dump. All equipment was abandoned; the battalion packed like sardines on its few trucks and lorries, set off back. A squadron of the 12th Lancers had stayed behind to help in any way that it possibly could, and escorted the battalion back through the enemy columns. This extraordinary cavalcade came into Charruba with the vehicles springs bent flat and the bodies bumping on the back axles.

With the Armoured Division at Charruba the situation was thought to be changed again. The way through the western end of the Jebel was still blocked and so the withdrawal was stopped. Garrisons returned to the escarpment passes. The 7th Brigade moved south to Ghemimes and Soluch, with orders to operate columns to the south.

Yet when General Taker, commander of the 4th Indian Division, looked at his dispositions, he could not be pleased with them. Every mile to Derna was vulnerable and he had two weak Brigades, four battalions in all, to protect one hundred and forty miles. To send the 7th Brigade further to the south invited trouble, unless it was certain that the 1st Armoured Division could prevent the panzers entering the Jebel.

At this time there were two alternative plans with all orders prepared; one was for an advance and the other for retreat through Benghazi with all speed. The code word to put the orders for attack into operation was "Deanna Durbin"; that for retreat was "Myrna Loy." There was considerable tension at 7th Brigade Headquarters. Brigadier Briggs realised that his force was in a tricky position which might easily turn out to be exceedingly nasty. The Brigade Major, Major H. A. Hughes, waited by the telephone, waiting for the word which would make the decision. Every time the telephone tinkled, all those near by stayed still in breathless silence until it was found that the message was about something else—and everything else seemed trivial. Which would it be? At the moment Myrna Loy was a far more popular star than Deanna Durbin. Then a cockney signaller remarked to the B.M. "And what'll we do, sir, if Shirley Temple comes through"—and tension had gone.

The Army Commander (General Ritchie) arrived in Benghazi at noon on January 26, and as a result of

his conference a plan was made by which the 11th Brigade would join the 1st Division at Charruba and advance on the enemy from the north, while the 7th Brigade crossed the Sheleidima Pass and fell on the rear of the German forces. Preparations were made but the actual orders had to await news of what Rommel was doing.

But while British plans were being made, Rommel must also have been reviewing the situation. He undoubtedly had an accurate picture of the British dispositions. Furthermore, he could scarcely have missed the long columns of dust which showed strong forces (they were the Polish and Fighting French Brigades and elements of the 50th Northumbrian Division) to be moving south and west to block any advance across the desert. The 7th Armoured Division, for which he had a healthy respect,* would probably be found somewhere between Mekili and Bir Hakeim. If he pushed on to the east, he must accept battle with strong and fresh formations, in the certain knowledge that the 4th Indian Division would crash into his rear at the first opportunity. It was sounder to deal with the Indian Division first, while they were strung out on an attenuated line, with an extremely vulnerable flank. The 1st Armoured Division, to be sure, guarded that flank. But Rommel probably had a better idea of how many runners it could muster for battle than had the British Command. (It was in fact only twenty-two; less than one regiment.) However, in the late evening of January 27, air reports arrived that large columns of the enemy were moving east from Msus towards Mekili. If these were true, Rommel

*The 7th Armoured Division was the first formation to go into the desert at the outbreak of war, followed two months later by the 4th Indian Division. These two Divisions considered themselves the elite of the Eighth Army, a view with which the Germans apparently agreed. A captured note written by a German Staff Officer read:—"So long as the 7th Armoured Division and the Indian Division are in the desert we must watch out. They will be the spearhead of any attack."

had delivered himself into our hands. Now was the time to attack.

On January 28—one of the most exciting days in 4th Division history—dawn reconnaissance revealed some two thousand vehicles north-east of Sheleidima, already in the outspurs of the Jebel and within twenty-five miles of the southern road at El Abiar. Rommel had bluffed successfully. The attack might yet prevent the Germans cutting through the Jebel and isolating the 7th Brigade.

Disaster

On the morning of January 28, the 7th Brigade was operating in three mobile groups, two of which were forward and the other in reserve. "Gold Group," under the command of Lieut.-Colonel C. Goulder, D.S.O., had been patrolling the main Benghazi-Jedabya road, southwards from Magrun, and had had considerable success. It consisted of:—

4th Bn. 11th Sikh Regiment.

31st Field Regiment (consisting of Headquarters and one battery only).

One Battery of 65th Anti-tank Regiment.

Two Troops of 57th Light A.A. Regiment.

One Squadron of the Central India Horse.

"Silver Group," under the command of Lieut.-Colonel G. C. Evans, D.S.O., was raiding south from Soluch, along the foot of the escarpment. The following units were in the group:—

1st Bn. The Royal Sussex Regiment.

One Battery of 25th Field Regiment.

One Battery of 65th Anti-tank Regiment.

Two Troops of 57th Light A.A. Regiment.

One Squadron of Central India Horse.

Headquarters Group was at Soluch and consisted of the following:—

One Company of 4th Bn. 16th Punjab Regiment.

Headquarters and a Squadron of Central India Horse.

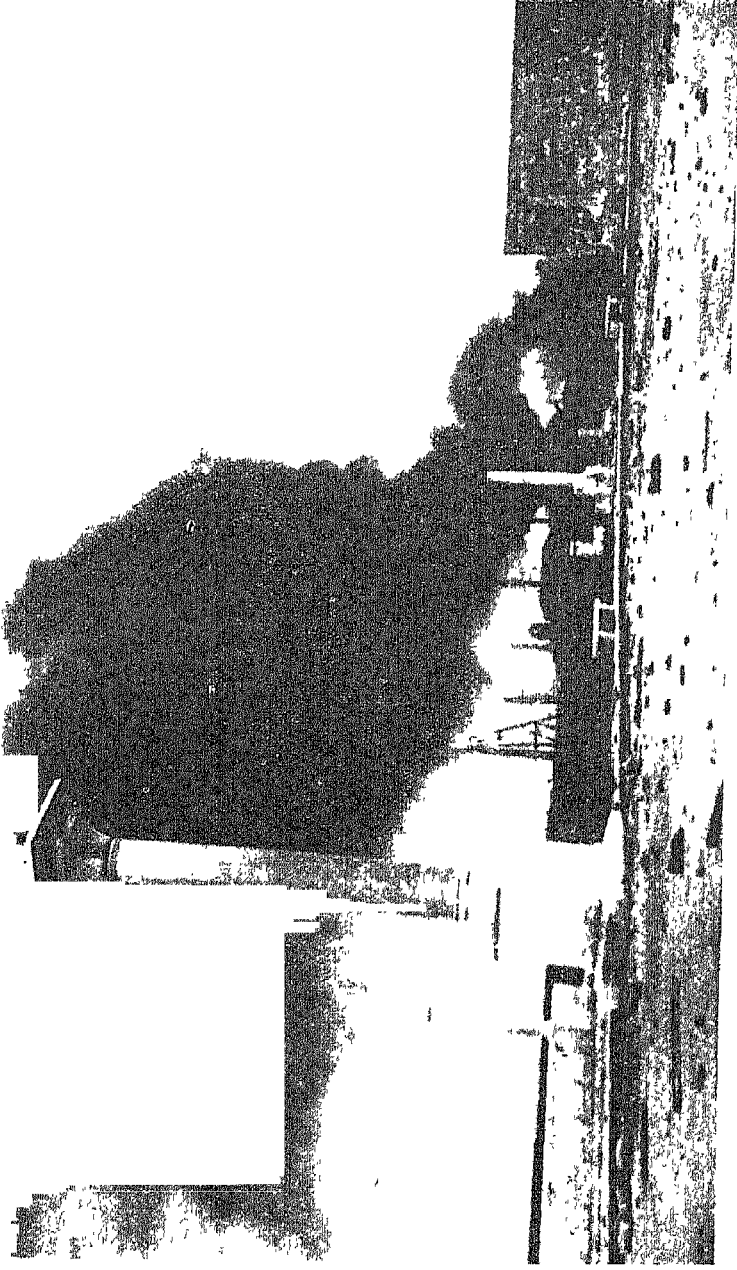
Two Troops of 57th Light A.A. Regiment.

12th Field Company Madras Sappers and Miners.

In addition to these mobile columns, the Sheleidima Pass was held, H.Q. and two companies of the Welch Regiment, one company of 4/16th Punjab Regiment with 25-pounders, anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. Another company of the Welch, with the carrier platoon of the Punjabis and a few anti-tank guns, held the less important Si Brahîm Pass, further to the north.

On receipt of orders to attack, Gold and Silver Groups prepared to move to Sheleidima at once, but before they were under way news arrived from the south. Patrols of the Central India Horse reported that two enemy columns, consisting of forty tanks each with lorried infantry and guns, were advancing northwards up the coastal corridor. One column followed the base of the escarpment, and the other the coastal road. If unobstructed these columns would reach Benghazi within a few hours, so Brigadier Briggs turned south to face this thrust, abandoning for the time being the movement across the Sheleidima Pass.

Time was now the crucial factor. Enemy forces with armour were advancing from two directions, in sufficient strength to overwhelm the defences. If they could be held off for a few hours, it was possible that the intervention of the British tanks from Charruba might be enough to turn the scale. Dispositions were made for the defence of Benghazi, street by street. Gold Group was ordered to fall back along the main road behind the Nawaghia minefields. Silver Group was to hold back the enemy forces advancing along the foot of the escarpment, so that Sheleidima might still be held. While this was happening the only other



Taken an hour before the Germans re-entered Benghazi this picture shows harbour installations being blown up by our demolition squads.

troops available, the 8th Royal Tank Regiment, two companies of the Welch and a company of the 2/5th Mahrattas, with some anti-tank guns, moved out of Benghazi, with a view to establishing contact with 5th Brigade patrols from Barce and with the 1st Armoured Division.

During the morning Brigadier Briggs reported that his columns were under pressure. Heavy air attacks and clumps of roving tanks were making disengagement difficult. The situation was particularly critical at Sheleidima, where an enemy force arrived from the east at the same moment that the coastal column arrived. Twenty-four tanks were reported on their way to Soluch in rear of Silver Group, which was being forced back. H.Q. and a company of the Welch were overrun, with some guns. A weak battery of the 25th Field Regiment was hotly engaged with tanks and lorried infantry. Havildar Pritam Singh, in charge of ammunition lorries, brought them up to the guns and delivered the ammunition under fire. Then off he went to Soluch to refill. But Soluch was deserted. Panzers were approaching. Pritam Singh drove to the dump, filled up the lorries and, with panzers all around, sneaked through the enemy and drove forward to the battery. There he delivered his load to the guns when the enemy tanks were being engaged only one thousand yards away.

Gold Group was less menaced, as it dropped back along the main road. The air was full of planes and the 57th L.A.A. gunners were in their best form. The morning bag was four Stukas and a ME 110.

It was clear that the enemy were committed to an immediate attack on Benghazi in overwhelming force. How soon were the British tanks going to arrive?

Then came a shock!

The remains of the 1st Armoured Division had not been directed on the enemy columns in the out-spurs of the Jebel as arranged, but into the desert east of Msus. There was no hope of aid from that quarter. It would only be a matter of hours until the enemy tanks came swarming into Benghazi from the east as well as the south—and the end would come.

Retreat by the southern road into the Jebel was already impossible. It would be difficult by the northern road ; with delay it also would be impossible. Destruction of all supplies and installations was ordered. Movement of base formations and the R.A.F. began immediately. Orders for withdrawal were issued.

All afternoon the Benghazi foreshore rocked as thousands of tons of captured enemy ammunition went up in sheets of flame. Great supply dumps were fired and the town lay under a pall of smoke. As no reports had come in from the 8th Royal Tank Regiment, patrolling the country round El Abiar and Regima, it seemed that the German advance through the Dahar el Ahmar ridges must have been slow. At 3.30 p.m. Division Headquarters left for Barce. As night fell all base and other heavy transport had been cleared, and " B " Echelons of the 7th Brigade were on the move towards Benghazi.

In the closing winter twilight, enemy ground-strafting planes streaked along the main roads shooting up transport. Over the escarpment beyond Benina aerodrome dim shapes lumbered out of the shrub driving on the airfield. They swept on down the road to the outskirts of Benghazi, where the by-pass was already full of 7th Brigade vehicles. Two companies of the Welch Regiment and some Sappers and Miners were covering the road. Near at hand was the 171st A.A. Battery, which had already bagged some Stukas earlier in the day. The venomous Bofors swung into action and several clips of shells were poured into the



Lt Col. S. S. Lavender, D.S.O. (Bar), 4/16 Punjabis

advancing tanks at point blank range. In an instant four German panzers were reduced to blazing scrap metal and an ammunition wagon disintegrated in a blast of flame. Lieut.-Colonel Peake of the Royals, who was in command of the party covering the town, flung out his men along the Benina road, and the Benghazi by-pass was clear. Lorries began to defile round the town and emerge onto the coastal highway.

It was now completely dark and enemy guns on the brow of the escarpment began to harass the roads. An ammunition dump north of the town blew up, adding a display of fireworks to the sombre red glow of the burning town. Suddenly near Coefia, eight miles from Benghazi, red and green tracers spurted across the road. The "B" Echelon transport of the 7th Brigade jammed on the narrow raised highway, and it tried to wheel about and make for safety. The enemy had won the cross country race. The road was cut.

Lieut.-Colonel S. S. Lavender of the 4/16th Punjab Regiment was on the by-pass with one company of his battalion when the news of the block reached him. He immediately pushed up the road in the dark through the massed transport, and found a group of enemy armoured cars sweeping a section of the built-up road with machine-gun fire. A machine-gun nest had been established in a building commanding the road. The first of the lorried infantry had just arrived as the Punjabis reached the head of the column of transport. The Indians dashed at them. They were met with heavy small arms fire and could not close. Captain Chase of the Punjabis came up with two captured Breda guns and four carriers from the Central India Horse. Four two-pounders were brought up and opened fire on the machine-gun nests covering the road. A company of the Welch also arrived and were thrown in. But to no avail. At least one 75-mm. gun had

arrived and tanks could be heard snorting in the darkness. The investment was complete and first light promised to put an end to everyone in the trap.

Under orders from Colonel Lavender, British and Indian soldiers began to melt away in the darkness; to thread their way through the German cordon and to find sanctuary in the Jebel underbrush. Others hurried back through Benghazi to try to join the groups of the 7th Brigade. By morning all resistance by the little covering party and the men of the transport echelons had ceased, and along silent reeking streets the German advanced guards worked through Benghazi, until they came to the utter desolation of the water front.

TEN

Benghazi—The Break-out

NIGHT had closed over a wild scene in Benghazi. Heavy clouds scurried across the sky and a shrill blustery gale whipped in from the sea. Winter rain fell in torrents. Along the black streets transport raced furiously. Thunderous blasts shook the town as the demolition engineers worked on. From the north-east came a crackle of gun-fire, as Colonel Lavender with his Welch and Punjabis valiantly strove to break out. To the east along the escarpment, the leaguer flares of the Germans rose constantly as more men and guns closed round the doomed port. Only to the south the darkness was unbroken. Here at the airfield beside the Jedabya road Brigadier Briggs sat in his staff car in the beating rain, and pieced together the situation.

The boom of guns at Coefia, the soaring flares along the line of the escarpment, told the 7th Brigade commander all that he needed to know. He was cut off, surrounded and in the gravest peril. As he studied his map, the desert called with no uncertain voice. It was the only way out. If the enemy could be dodged in the coastal corridor his Brigade might escape.

This night of storm was made for adventure. The pelting rain drove the enemy into close leaguer and blurred the sentries' eyes. The darkness was a dense

curtain, although later there would be a moon. If dawn broke with the columns beyond the Jedabya-Antelat trails, the danger would be over. That meant seventy-five miles across rough country. Could it be done?

The weather was a good friend. Other circumstances helped. The Brigade was already organised in three mobile columns and consequently could move off in desert formation without delay. The backdoor to Benghazi was still open.

At 8 p.m. all plans had been laid. A message was sent to Colonel Lavender at Coefia asking him to arrange his own route if he could break away. A similar message went to Colonel Peake of the Royals, who was holding the road block between Benina aerodrome and the town. The following signal then sped to Gold and Silver Groups:—

“Road cut. Groups must make own way over desert. Carry only personnel and weapons. Conserve petrol by destroying surplus vehicles. Good luck everyone.”

In the darkness and rain the word passed from vehicle to vehicle. The distance to safety was three hundred miles. A check-up showed that there was not enough petrol for all vehicles. Private kit and all stores, except food, water, fuel and ammunition, were ruthlessly jettisoned. All documents, codes, files and maps were destroyed. Most of the Bren carriers, because of their high petrol consumption, were drained of oil, and their engines raced until they seized. Fire or explosive could not be used, so pickaxes and bayonets were plied on radiators and tyres. A signaller in a letter recounts his sadness when obliged to use a hammer on his wireless transmitter-receiver. By 11 p.m. all was in readiness. The columns of Headquarters Group formed up and wheeled about on the air-field. As an omen of good fortune, the moon elected to show



Brigadier H. R. Briggs, D.S.O.

for a moment through the clouds. The breakout was under way.

We must now follow the fortunes of the Groups individually.

Headquarters Group

Brigadier Briggs took personal command. In addition to his original units, three companies of the 4/16th Punjab Regiment and one and half companies of the Welch reached the rendezvous of Headquarters Group before the columns moved off. The Group therefore was a fairly strong formation, of perhaps twelve hundred men and three hundred vehicles. It proceeded south in single file until the gap in the minefield had been negotiated. At 2.30 a.m. a halt was called, and the first of a series of regular check-ups was instituted. A number of doubtful vehicles were destroyed. At 3.11 a.m. the march was resumed over very rough country. Fortunately the moon had broken through the clouds, and it was possible to avoid large boulders and similar obstacles. At 4.15 a.m. the columns were abreast of Soluh, which was easily identified by the steady soar and fall of flares from a large German leaguer. The columns swung wide into the east, within a few miles of the escarpment.

Moonset found the Group crossing the arable area to the east of Magrun. Here the first alarm occurred. The Staff Captain and the Brigade Major in a leading vehicle heard a cock crow. "Damn . . ." said Captain T. C. W. Roe. "Why must we run into a village when we particularly want to avoid one?" The column was slightly altered, and the column went on. Ten miles later another cock crew lustily near at hand. "It can't be another village," said the worried Staff Captain. Major Hughes darkly suggested inferior navigation; that in the darkness they had swung in a circle, and were back at the same village. This called for investigation. The column halted while the Staff

Captain reconnoitred. He came back chuckling. The cock was "meat on the hoof" carried by some troops in a lorry a hundred yards behind.

At dawn Headquarters Group was deep in enemy country and making good progress. The Beda Fomm-Antelat track, more than sixty miles from the starting point, was crossed in the first light. One or two alarms had turned out to be no more than Arab encampments and camel herds. Rigid orders had been issued that fire was not to be opened. There was no reason to believe that the enemy knew that troops had broken out of Benghazi.

Now that it was light the columns dispersed more widely. Some miles ahead long ridges of dust revealed the heavily used Jedabya-Antelat trails. As the Group approached, enemy traffic was seen to be moving along the trails in both directions. A halt was called while a large German convoy escorted by tanks passed along the track only five hundred yards ahead of the leading trucks. No detour was possible. The story of this exciting clash with the enemy is well told in the Regimental News Letter of the Central India Horse.

"Vehicles appeared on the crest of the rise over which we had to pass. Coming down the slope they turned along the track to Jedabya. A small enemy convoy was also seen coming in the opposite direction toward Antelat. Three enemy aircraft flew very low over the valley just ahead. After watching the enemy lorries for a few minutes, the Brigade Commander went back to his car, and said:—"Cross the road." We set off on what all regarded as the critical phase of our journey. Nearing the road we could see four tanks about 800 yards away with men working on them. A motor cyclist passed along the road 200 yards ahead of our leading truck. A staff car coming from the opposite direction halted for a few minutes beside the tanks and then went on. Just as we crossed the road,

two big lorries, which had been moving towards us, apparently became suspicious and also halted near the tanks. A big gun on tow, a straggler from one of the enemy convoys, was only fifty yards away from us. Its driver was quite oblivious of us, and he pulled up to allow one of our three-tonners to pass in front.

"In one of our vehicles were five German prisoners. The sowars stood over them with the butts of their rifles held ready—ready to bash their heads in if they attempted to give the alarm. One prisoner started to pull himself to his feet, but was quickly hauled down again by his comrades. Afterwards one German officer said:—'I rather gather you must be in flight, but now you are out of danger.' Before crossing the road the atmosphere was tense in the extreme, but now spirits rose as escape became more than a bare possibility.

"When we had crossed the road, there was rather an ugly rush up the slope on the far side of the road, over the hill, on the final step from the coastal plain to the desert. Most of us did not know until later that there was considerable excuse for hurrying. Having at last realised our identity, the enemy tanks had attacked the tail of our column."

In the scurry to get to dead ground, a group of vehicles with one anti-aircraft gun and two anti-tank guns became bogged in soft sand. It seems possible that the tanks moved up the road with a view in the first instance to assisting them. The platoon of 4/16th Punjab Regiment and the guns never rejoined the columns, and doubtless were taken by the enemy.

Another thirty miles across broken country brought Headquarters Column to the south of Saunnu. Here a halt was called for a check up on fuel, and to place on tow a number of vehicles which had developed defects. The columns immediately pushed on into the trackless desert, to the east. The going was better,

with large stretches of hard sand. Again the news letter of the Central India Horse tells the story well :—

“ Driving all day in a shallow depression of the desert with a rim of high ground extending many miles round the horizon, we might have expected to be observed from many of the numerous, but distant, view points. But neither on this day nor the next did we see any further sign of enemy movement, either on the ground or in the air. Halts were few and short, but at dusk we had a longer break when we got into night formation, and the remaining petrol reserves were issued to give all vehicles an equal share. On this second of our sleepless nights, between which was sandwiched a long day's driving, fatigue began to produce hallucinations. In the slanting rays of a low moon, the play of shadows on a mass of vehicles moving over the flat horizonless desert produced visions of mosques and houses, palm trees, pools of water and even leafy English lanes, down which one appeared to be wandering. Keeping awake called for a strong mental effort. Many did not succeed, but no serious accident occurred.”

At moonset, at 5 a.m. on the morning of January 30, a long halt was called. Kettles went on the fire for tea and breakfast. In thirty hours' continuous travel the column had covered nearly two hundred and fifty miles. Its position was some eighty miles south-west of Mekili, and the sole remaining anxiety was whether this group of desert wells remained in British hands.

At 7 a.m. radio silence was broken and contact made with 13th Corps. Joyous news came through. The Corps learnt for the first time that part at least of the 7th Brigade had escaped. In turn Headquarters Group heard that Mekili was still in British hands.

When the Corps asked for the column's location, there was a conference round the radio set. All codes

had been destroyed, and to give figures in clear invited Stukas. It happened, however, that a section of New Zealanders, who had operated the Corps tentacle, were with the column. They remembered that each operator with Corps had a number. They had a list of the operators. For the four figures of the map reference, they signalled "Smith, Jones, Norman and Brown." Without delay the Corps deciphered this message.

Before the wireless closed down, more good news came out of the air. Gold Group had been listening in, and now reported its position further to the south, but nearly as far east as Headquarters Group. With light hearts and strength replenished, the column moved off again on a bearing for Mekili. But excitement was not yet over. About 9 a.m. the chief clerk leaned forward and said, almost in a whisper, to the Brigade Major :—"Don't look behind, sir. They're following us!" And there on the horizon many miles away were armoured cars. It seemed hard to be caught when so near safety, but nothing could be done about it. Speed could not be increased owing to the many crocks in the Group. All through the morning the cars crept closer, and they were watching from the north as well. At last they closed—to reveal armoured car patrols of the Royals, who had been highly suspicious of this large formation. At 3 p.m. the columns came over the ridges into Mekili and filled up with petrol. A tired but thankful body of men proceeded to bivouac within the Free French and Polish lines.

Gold Group

For Colonel Goulder's Gold Group, January 28 had been a busy day. On the night of the 27th, one column consisting of two companies of the 4/11th Sikh Regiment and some guns had leaguered at Magrun, some twenty miles south of Ghemimes. The remainder of the Group were fifteen miles further south, at Sidi Abd el Aati on the main road to Jedabya. As previously

mentioned, orders had been issued to move across to the Sheleidima Pass, but the advance of the German columns from the south made this impossible. At 1.30 p.m. the Division had ordered withdrawal through Benghazi to D'Annunzio. As the Magrun column was embussing, twenty-one enemy aircraft passed overhead at a height of seven hundred feet. Every gun and rifle in the column opened on them. Three planes crashed in flames and two others were losing height when they disappeared.

Thirteen miles south of Benghazi, Gold Group halted until 7.30 p.m., in order to allow "B" Echelon vehicles to clear the town on their way back. When the Group moved again the road was very congested, and progress was slow. At Guarscia, ten miles south of Benghazi, Brigadier Briggs waited at the cross roads. He informed Colonel Goulder that both roads out of Benghazi were cut and that the desert offered the only way of escape. The choice of route was left to the Group commander. After a short conference with his officers, Colonel Goulder decided to lie doggo for the day east of Magrun, where in some past age a river washed down loam from the escarpment, and a tract of fertile land is cultivated to some extent by Arabs. This halt was designed to allow Gold Group to cross the danger zone of the Jedabya-Antelat trails by night. After passing between Antelat and Saunnu, Colonel Goulder planned to turn sharply to the north, to skirt Msus, and to continue to the north-east along one of the many trails which lead to Mekili.

While the column was turning it was reinforced by the 12th Field Company Madras Sappers and Miners and a platoon of the 4/16th Punjab Regiment. Later "B" Echelon of the 31st Field Regiment and also some of the 25th joined. With skill, initiative and courage they had disentangled themselves from the jam of transport south of Coefia, turned round in the

dark on the narrow road and had gone back to their units—towards the enemy. At 11 p.m. Gold Group, now consisting of approximately three hundred vehicles, moved on to the south. Ten miles north of Ghemimes, the columns left the main road, and formed desert night formation on a bearing calculated to take them between Ghemimes and Soluch and well to the east of Magrun.

The ground was intensely rough, and it was difficult to keep bearing as the columns snaked backward and forward in search of passable terrain. As a result, when at 6 a.m. they halted for the day's hideaway, they were well west of their projected line of march, and in the first light, they saw the glaring white buildings of Magrun less than two miles away. By great good luck the inhabitants and garrison of the place were late risers, and the columns hastily moved several miles eastward without alarm. A concealed dispersal area was found; detachments of mobile sentries took station on the outskirts of the area, and the order issued that no movement, fires, nor digging of slit trenches would be permitted.

That long halt in the midst of the enemy was a first-class test of nerves. At any minute panzers might come thundering in to the kill. During the morning enemy aircraft flew low over the columns. Several men from sheer force of habit, began to dig slit trenches. At 11 a.m. an artificer sergeant-major of an anti-aircraft regiment, reported in with a three-ton lorry, three other ranks and two wounded Italian prisoners. The sergeant-major had been stuck in the sand for eighteen hours near Magrun. An Italian officer on a motor cycle, with his orderly in a side-car, noticed his predicament, halted, drew his pistol, and bade the sergeant-major surrender. The reply was a pistol fusilade which brought the officer down. The orderly ran: the S.M. seized a rifle from his lorry and dropped the man also. When the lorry had at last been dug out

the prisoners were bundled into it and on arrival both wounded men received immediate attention from medical officers in the column.

Slowly the day wore away. A petrol census was taken and it was discovered that by destroying a number of vehicles, it would be possible to allot sufficient fuel for two hundred miles desert travel. Then just before night closed down an alarm came. An enemy column was advancing on Gold Group's dispersal area from the south. Guns and men hurried into position to make a fight for it. But to everyone's relief, when the enemy was two miles away, his columns swung onto the main road at Magrun, and passed on to the north.

At 5.30 p.m. twilight fell. The columns formed up in night formation and moved to the south. The first acute danger zone—the Beda Fomm-Antelat track—was crossed safely. As the columns swung due south to round Antelat, nineteen troop lorries in the rear of the column carrying approximately three hundred men, became bogged in soft sand in an area through which German transport was passing constantly. Ordinarily the remainder of the columns would have gone on in the darkness, without missing the bogged vehicles, and they would have been lost. A lance-corporal of the R.A.S.C., however, who was driving the only 4-wheel-drive vehicle, happened to spot the lorries in trouble. He undertook to pull them out single-handed. One by one, he yanked them from the sand and sent them on to catch up with the column. The action of this junior N.C.O. undoubtedly saved this considerable party from capture.

The Antelat-Saunnu tracks were crossed without incident, but it now became tricky going, as the columns had to pass between two enemy camps. For half an hour the vehicles threaded a lane with fires and flares on both sides. Thereafter the going was

better, and when dawn broke, Gold Group believed itself to be fairly clear of the enemy. At 8 a.m. the columns halted for breakfast.

It was then discovered that Gold Group had, as guests, two officers of the Rifle Brigade. They had been cut off from their battalion well south of Jedabya. They had walked forty miles northward along the main road. When their feet began to give out they decided to steal a vehicle. A staff car came along. One officer jumped out of hiding and signalled the car to stop. It did so and two Germans got out. The second officer thereupon emerged from behind the car with his pistol, frisked the Germans and left them standing! The officers took a bearing to the north-east and drove into the desert. The little god that is said to sit aloft, looking after sailors and children, took compassion on them. In the middle of the night they ran into Gold Group in the open desert. They had less than a half gallon of petrol in their tank.

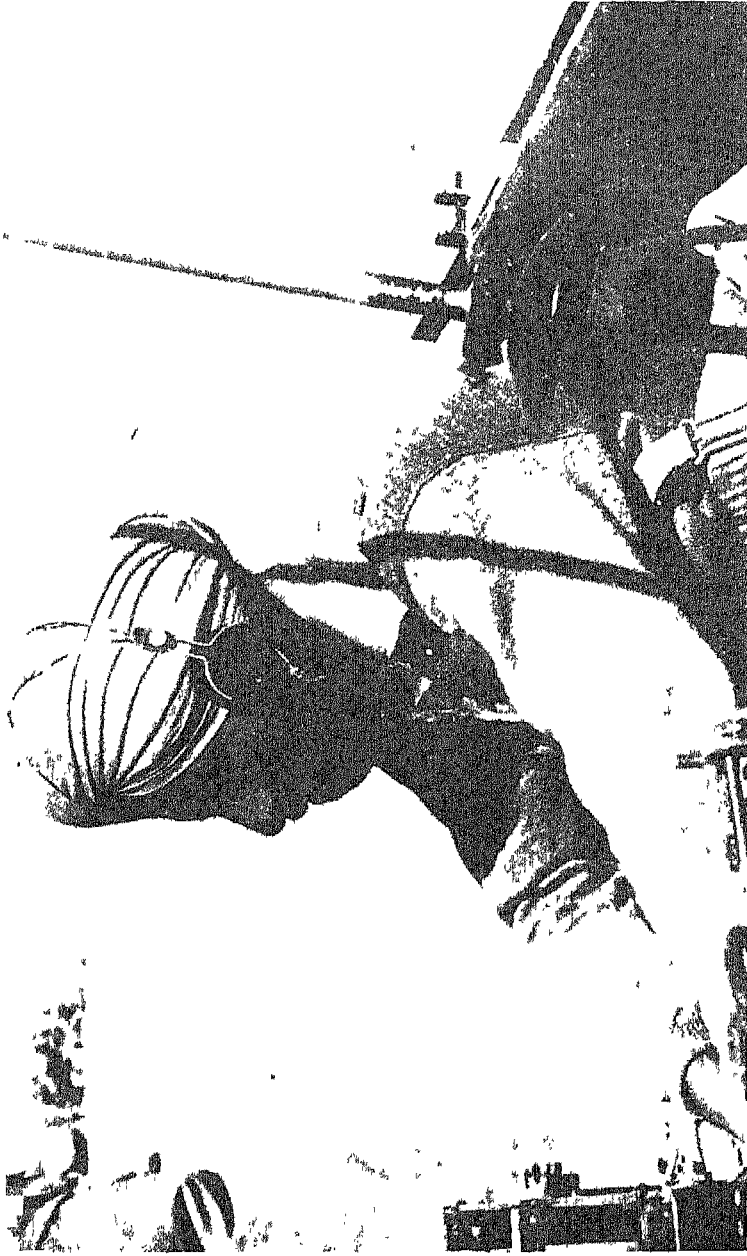
The riflemen held the palm for luck for less than one brief day. That evening Lieutenant Durrant, an Ack-Ack gunner, came in with an authentic and even more astounding story. In the course of the day, one of his trucks had dropped behind. He went back ten miles to look for it, and thereafter turned to catch up with the column. His driver then discovered that there was no oil in the engine. They took off the air filter and poured the contents (perhaps half a pint) into the engine. A few miles later, when the engine began to smoke and promised to seize within a few minutes, they saw beside the track miles and miles from anywhere a petrol tin. They drove up scarcely daring to hope. It was an unopened tin of engine oil.

The Central India Horse, keeping a screen to the north, reported at 8.30 a.m. that a heavy group of enemy motor transport was approaching. The artillery and anti-tank guns (seven 25-pounders of the 31st

Field Regiment, two troops of anti-aircraft guns, and one troop of anti-tank guns) took position to cover the retirement of the troop lorries. Four tanks led the approach. Unfortunately the anti-tank guns could not restrain themselves, and opened fire at long range, before the 25-pounders could get on the targets. The tanks wheeled into the north, and no more was seen of them. The columns reorganised and headed on into the north-east.

During the day enemy planes flew low over the columns of vehicles. Fire was not opened and the aircraft after circling round, flew away, obviously puzzled. One returned and fired a burst from his machine-gun. Still no reply, and at last satisfied, the planes went away.

At breakfast time wireless communication had been established with 13th Corps. An instruction was now received to make for Tengeder, thirty miles south of Mekili on the Msus-Bir Hakeim trail. Line of march was altered, and good progress was made. Late in the afternoon, Central India Horse patrols dropped back on the columns with a few friends of the 11th Hussars, who had been searching for the Group. They reported petrol fifteen miles away. On the average the vehicles had only thirty miles of fuel left. The Group went into leaguer for the night at Bel-Amia on the Trigh el-Abd, forty miles south-west of Tengeder. Next morning vehicles were sent to draw fuel, and the march was continued at 11 a.m. The columns reached Tengeder shortly after midday. The remainder of the passage was uneventful, and Gold Group came into El Adem at 4 p.m. on the afternoon of February 1, with a total loss during the march of no personnel and thirty-one vehicles. To the 4/11th Sikh Regiment who comprised the majority of the column, thirty of the vehicles were of no account. But the battalion water truck, which had done 45,000 miles in the Western Desert, Sudan,



A Sikh sepy at his wireless

Eritrea and Libya, had also given up the ghost. Its driver, Naik Basant Singh, would not be comforted.

Gold Group arrived at El Adem with an average of thirty-five men to each troop carrier. Everything except water, rations and arms had been jettisoned.

Silver Group

Throughout January 28 Lieut.-Colonel Evans' Silver Group had dropped back slowly in front of the enemy advancing along the line of the escarpment. It had had much fighting during the day, but had disengaged successfully, when orders to retire were received, and had withdrawn behind the minefields. When orders were received to break out of the trap through the desert, the Group mustered on the narrow highway south of the airfield. It turned its long single-file column with some difficulty and returned to Nawaghia station, where a squadron of the C.I.H. waited at the gap in the minefields.

The columns passed through the minefield on a 2-vehicle front at 1 a.m. on January 29 and keeping well to the east of the coastal roads, began to work to the south. As long as the moon was up, there was enough light to see without being seen, and in spite of the roughness of the ground, the columns made good headway for the next few hours. At 7 a.m. a halt was called for breakfast at Got-es-Saeti, half-way between Antelat and Magrun. It was then discovered that a platoon of the Royal Sussex was missing, and that a troop of anti-aircraft guns and several men of the Welch Regiment had joined the column during the night.

At 8.45 a.m. the columns moved off on the critical stage of their journey. An error in compass bearing brought them within view of the escarpment, north of Antelat. Just as direction was being altered, the carrier platoon of the Royal Sussex, acting as left

flank guard, saw a number of vehicles defiling across the escarpment at Eluet Abdalla, four miles north of Antelat. First came two tanks, then a stream of lorries. This was immediately reported to Colonel Evans, who gave orders to attack. The enemy column had not been spotted by the front section of carriers, which had gone on, and so only six vehicles were available. As they turned towards the enemy, the tanks were well ahead, and twenty lorries, two staff cars and a number of motor cyclists were descending the escarpment. The carriers dashed in. A lorry wheeled and dropped its tail board, revealing a storm-gun which opened fire. The remainder of the enemy vehicles turned and fled up hill at full speed. The escort tanks either overlooked or ignored what was happening. The carriers were able to cut off the last seven lorries before they reached the crest of the escarpment and a wild shooting-up occurred. The enemy storm-gun went out of action when a bullet from a Boyes anti-tank rifle penetrated the shield of the gun, and killed both the layer and the crew commander. Fourteen dead Italians were found in and about the lorries. One officer and twenty-seven men stood with their hands up. One lorry was carrying a load of diesel oil; another was loaded with eight motor cycles. The Royal Sussex had no casualties, nor suffered any damage to their vehicles. The prisoners were loaded with the diesel oil, and the other lorries were destroyed. Three hours later, the jubilant carrier section caught up with the main column.

At 1 p.m. two ME. 109's flew over the column. Against orders, one anti-aircraft gun opened fire and hit one of the aircraft. The other Messerschmidt returned to machine-gun the column, causing casualties. At 2 p.m. two flights of Italian planes dive-bombed the columns. A number of vehicles were hit. One officer and twelve men were killed, and sixteen wounded. At 3 p.m. another low-flying attack by Messerschmidts caused further casualties. The Group

was now being shadowed by enemy armoured cars and in a brush with Royal Sussex carriers one German prisoner was taken.

This harassing drove Silver Group deeper into the desert. At Alem Belsamen, ninety miles south-west of Tengeder, a halt was called at 6 p.m. to check up fuel supplies, and to destroy the remainder of the carriers because of their high petrol consumption. An all-night march began at 7.45 p.m. The moon was bright and the going good. By 5.30 a.m. on January 30 the columns had covered 120 miles on an easterly bearing. A halt was ordered and plans made for burying the guns and for using all available petrol to carry personnel into Jarabub. This move was planned owing to doubt as to the position at Mekili and Tengeder. While these orders were being put into effect, a patrol of the 150th British Infantry Brigade arrived with the welcome intelligence that the district was clear of the enemy. The columns followed the patrol back to the north, and that afternoon came into 150th Brigade Headquarters at Qarat el Auda, some fifteen miles to the east of Tengeder. On roll-call, a troop of 25-pounders and a platoon of the Royal Sussex were found to be missing, but these units managed to find their own way across the desert and arrived at Tobruk on February 1.

Survivors of the Coefia Action

It has been narrated how a company of the 4/16th Punjab Regiment and a company of the Welch strove on through the night of January 28 to force the Coefia block, and to open the way of escape. Half an hour before dawn Colonel Lavender of the Punjab Regiment called his men together, and told them the position was hopeless. In a few hours the enemy would close on them from all sides. He therefore ordered them to destroy their vehicles and gave them permission to endeavour to escape.

Approximately twelve miles from Coefia the rugged line of the escarpment stood bleakly into the east. There was good cover in this broken upland. Roughly one hundred officers and men struck off across country on foot. The line of light began to thicken in the east and it became a race to reach the slopes before the enemy forces on the coastal plain could observe them. The party passed through parks of enemy transport warming up and reached the cover of the escarpment in safety. Continuing east across country for some miles, they struck the railway line, and throughout the next day followed it towards Barce. They had, however, been observed by some Senussis of the Libyan Arab Force, who were also making their way to the east. These Senussis guided the party into a Bedouin camp, where food was provided, and afterwards led them by little-used trails to Tecnis. Here they crossed the southern road and went northwards towards D'Annunzio, where firing could be heard. Before they could make contact the British rearguard dropped back, and the party continued to push on to the east.

On the first three days of travel the party covered sixty miles, which was good going considering the roughness of the country and the lack of food and blankets in the raw Jebel weather. On February 2 Arab scouts brought the news that Marawa was in German hands. The party therefore decided to continue their march to Tmimi along the low valleys between the two main roads.

Next day they again crossed the southern road near Slonta, thirty-five miles west of Jovanni Berta, and once again they heard firing ahead to spur them on. It was only a rearguard brush, for the 4th Division had now evacuated Cirene and was dropping back on Tmimi. The indomitable party therefore missed friends for the second time. On February 5, twenty miles

south of Jovanni Berta, in the broken ground where the Jebel begins to sink into the desert, an extraordinary meeting occurred. Colonel Peake with a party of men had similarly escaped after holding the road block on the Benina road. Both parties had marched one hundred and twenty-five miles through enemy country, and by a strange coincidence had reached the same point at the same time. A proposal was made to waylay lorries on the Martuba road, so Colonel Peake with two other officers and a number of the Welch Regiment turned to the north. The remainder of the parties continued on their march to the east across rolling land cut by numerous wadis. They crossed the Mekili-Lamluda trail on February 6, and the Mekili-Derna track next day. The country was now alive with the enemy and it was necessary to move only by night.

On February 9 they lay all day within sight of an enemy post, garrisoned by tanks, guns and armoured cars. Although under direct observation, the Arab villagers brought food and water throughout the day to the British party. A local guide was supplied to lead them to Tmimi that night, but he led them into an enemy leaguer instead. His explanations were unsatisfactory, so his rifle was taken from him and he was sent on his way with a cuff on the ear.

Dawn found the wanderers near Temrod ridge, fifteen miles due south of Tmimi. They were in the enemy artillery lines. Tanks, heavy guns and field guns were all about them. At 10 a.m. an artillery duel began, with the British guns replying first from the east and then from the south. The party noted with satisfaction that the British fire was accurate. At dusk on the evening of February 10 they continued their march to the east, and encountered trip wires guarding minefields. This danger was successfully negotiated, when out of the darkness they were challenged in French. On replying in English, fire was opened and

they all went to ground. A few of the French scholars among the party shouted in that language ; whereupon fire was redoubled. Taking off their boots for quieter passage, the disheartened British and Indian party began to retreat through the minefield. Fortunately the alert Frenchmen had thrown out a patrol, which picked up a straggler. Then cheers rent the night, and the French came flocking out to give everyone a great welcome.

The odyssey was ended. The hospitable Frenchmen opened their mess in the middle of the night and, as Captain Chase of the Punjab Regiment put it, "compensated us for all our difficulties by a gallant session to which we did full justice from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. non-stop. Our only regret was that our splendid Arab friends were not with us to share the celebration."

An Individual Effort

The adventures of many other small groups could be chronicled, but space forbids. Throughout February they kept on slipping through into the British lines with tales of adventure, hardship and hair-raising escapes. But even individuals carried on in their attempts to get back and one story will suffice to show the general run of events.

During the start of the break-out from Benghazi, Sowar Deep Chand of the C.I.H. was with the Headquarters Group. His truck got separated in the dark, ran on a mine and was burnt out. The two other sowars were killed. Deep Chand hid in a wadi half a mile away, but he had nothing but his clothes ; no arms nor equipment. He decided to wait until dawn for he knew that Tobruk was in the direction of the sunrise.

After two or three miles walking next morning he struck an Arab tent "village." Nearby was an Italian tank, burnt out, with its crew of three dead

inside. Two hundred yards away was a British anti-tank gun, still mounted on its lorry with the muzzle trained on the tank, but also burnt out. Behind the gun was a dead British soldier. It was clear that wounded to death, with his lorry on fire beneath him, this gunner had fought to the very end. With his last shot he had hit the tank and avenged his own death.

Deep Chand now decided to disguise himself and exchanged his uniform for white Arab clothing. He kept only his warm khaki shirt, his pay book and fifty piastres. He helped himself to an Italian rug and pair of boots and some biscuits which he found lying about. Then he set out on his long walk east.

By now his smattering of Arabic was fast improving and he walked from one Arab encampment to another, finding shelter about every second day. There was never any difficulty about water for he drank from the rain puddles. Often British aircraft were over which cheered him immensely : friends were near. On one occasion he saw two Hurricanes strafing a column of vehicles near Barce, and afterwards he crept near to see what had happened. Five large petrol lorries were blazing fiercely and Deep Chand went on his way jubilant.

After a week his feet began to give trouble, slowing down his rate of progress, and he cursed his Italian boots heartily. He lay up near Derna aerodrome for a day or two to rest, and later reported that the bombing of the aerodrome was so severe that the enemy could never get any sleep. Near Tmimi he encountered an Arab policeman who searched him, took his fifty piastres and then left him. So for safety Deep Chand destroyed his pay book.

Near the Axis front line he met two Arab brothers. One had a tent behind the German lines and the other behind the British. The three started off to walk through the enemy lines, but were captured and

taken to a headquarters. After a day's questioning, during which the place was machine-gunned and three Germans wounded, they were told to get out—but eastward not westward.

Next day a man dressed as and looking like a Mahratta havildar, armed with a Tommy-gun, arrived at the tent. Deep Chand, fearing that it might be an enemy ruse, got the Arabs to open the conversation, but was assured that the man really was a Mahratta. (The story of the Mahratta is told at the end of the next chapter.) The havildar was then also disguised and that night they made their way through to the British lines, where they were picked up by South Africans, fed and sent back to Tobruk. The Arabs were rewarded with a gift of £2 from the South African squadron commander's own pocket.

Three days later Deep Chand rejoined his regiment. He had walked about two hundred miles in thirty-four days, never for one instant relinquishing his determination to get back to fight again.

The Success of the Break-out

Roll-call at railhead revealed the great success of the Benghazi break-out operation. As debit, one platoon of the Sussex had strayed in the darkness, and had never rejoined; one platoon of the 4/16th Punjab Regiment had been overrun by panzers; one 25-pounder and three light guns had been lost; two hundred transport vehicles and carriers had been destroyed. One officer and twelve men had been killed, and twenty-five men wounded, during the air attacks on Silver Group.

Against these losses, four thousand one hundred officers and men had come to safety. They brought eight hundred vehicles with them. They had killed fourteen of the enemy and brought thirty-five prisoners with them through the desert.

The break-out from Benghazi showed British and Indian troops at their best. From the moment that Brigadier Briggs, sitting in his staff car on that stormy night, gave the command, every heart rose to the tonic of a bold decision. They were audacious and it paid handsomely. Gold Group leaguering for the day in the midst of hostile forces; Headquarters Group cutting across the Jedabya-Antelat trails in the midst of the swarming enemy transport; Silver Group turning to strike venomously at a careless enemy; these were the daring acts which won their reward. High resolve was allied to good practical management, and every man responded with a supreme effort. By such virtues are victories won.

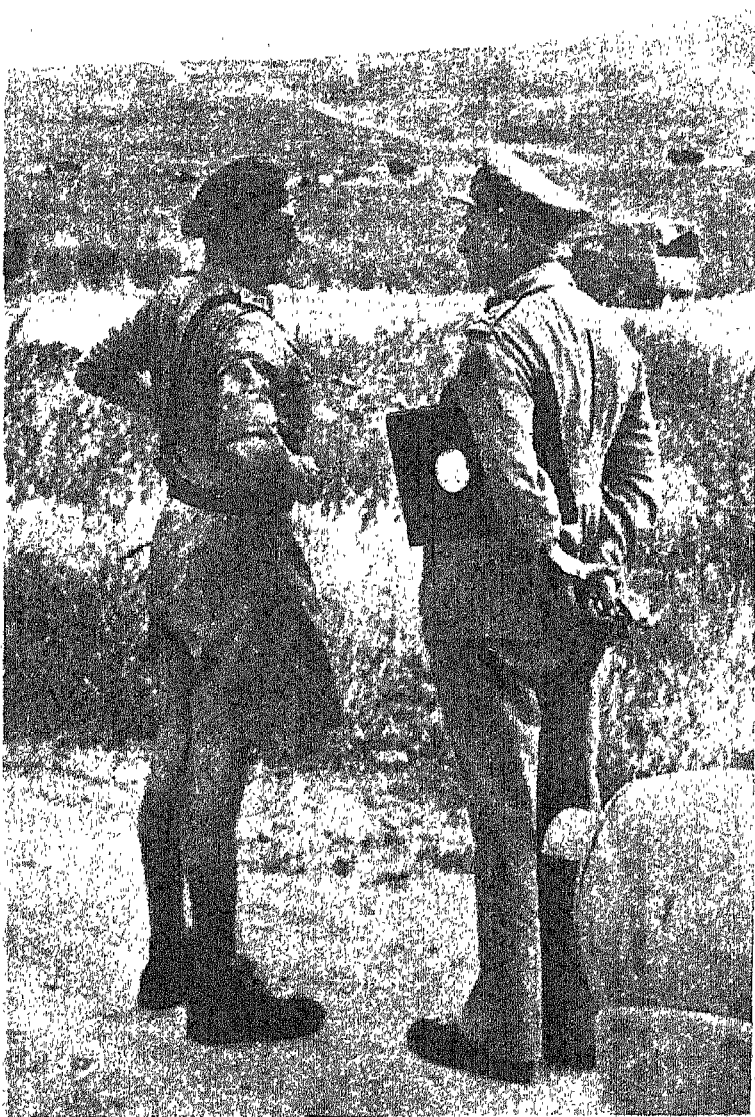
General Auchinleck made courage the keynote of his short stirring speech on March 7, when he reviewed the refitted 7th Brigade. "You got through because you were bold. Always be bold," he said.

ELEVEN

Stabilisation at Gazala

4TH Division Headquarters arrived at Barce in the early hours of January 29, and General Tucker took stock of his position. The 7th Brigade had gone off the air. (The message announcing Brigadier Briggs' intention to break out through the desert was never received.) A wireless intercept from the 4/16th Punjabis revealed action at Coefia, which suggested that the 7th Brigade was engaged along the coastal road. None of the units of that Brigade had reported in, neither was there any news of them from Tocra. It seemed certain that all forces left south of Benghazi were cut off. The first necessity was to bring all help to the beleaguered force, and so the 5th Brigade was ordered to move westward at dawn.

But the situation of the Division itself was far from satisfactory. The Axis had command of the desert and so would be able to infiltrate troops into the Jebel in rear. There was a strong possibility that the whole Division would be cut off, unless large reinforcements of armoured troops were moved forward to help the 1st Armoured Division. In the meantime additional strength had to be assembled to make the 4th Division able to fight any action at all. The 8th Royal Tank Regiment was already in hand, and the 1st and 144th Field Regiment arrived at Barce on the 29th. The



General Alexander (left) confers with Major-General Tucker, commanding the 4th Indian Division.

latter had belonged to the 5th Indian Division, with whom it had fought right through the East African campaign. The only infantry reinforcements available, the 3/1st Punjab and 1/6th Rajputana Rifles, were ordered to come forward immediately. Neither of these battalions was in shape for active operations. There were two completely new companies of recruits in the Punjab battalion, while Wellesley's Rifles had not had time to reorganise and re-equip after their ordeal at Antelat and Msus.

One interesting, rather than formidable reinforcement, also came into the divisional fold. A column, known as "E" Force and consisting of Indians and South Africans, had captured the Oasis of Jalo in December and thereafter had harried the flank of Rommel's army from the south. Part of this expedition had already returned to the Sollum area to refit, but Brigadier Reid with a battalion of the 2nd Punjab Regiment, six 25-pounders, one Bofors and eight South African armoured cars had remained behind. This force had been roaming in mobile columns, on January 21, some forty miles south-east of Jedabya. When Rommel's advance began, "E" Force found the enemy across its line of withdrawal. This was no new thing, and after some exciting brushes, in which the 25-pounders on one occasion fought off a large force of panzers, and were assisted by Stukas which heartily bombed their own men, the force turned up near Marawa, full of heart but in very bad shape. The transport was little more than tied together and the officers and men had been on half rations for several weeks. Nevertheless these men were ordered to fit into the divisional withdrawal and they responded magnificently.

The only other troops available for the defence of the Jebel were the King's Dragoon Guards with a detachment of South Africans, some forty armoured

cars in all, and a battalion of the Libyan Arab Force. The latter had no transport and could not be considered of any real fighting value.

Though the situation was unpleasant the 4th Division was not prepared to leave the 7th Brigade to its fate while any chance of succour remained. However, General Auchinleck had come up from Cairo and he arrived in Barce on the morning of January 29. He had a clear view of the situation and his orders were terse and to the point. No more troops were to be used forward of Barce. Losses must be cut. An immediate retirement to D'Annunzio on the upper road and to Marawa on the lower road was ordered. Patrols were recalled and that afternoon Tocra Pass, which offered the only approach from the sea, was blown up. That same afternoon Barce was evacuated and the defiles east of the town, where the roads enter the main ranges, were blocked by extensive demolitions.

This retreat was going to be no easy matter. There were numerous small trails through the mountains through which parties could infiltrate and block the rear of the retiring forces. The plan was for the 11th Brigade to move along the southern road and the 5th Brigade to take the northern. The real danger moment would come near Derna. Here two big trails come through from the desert, and with no forces to block them the line of retreat of both Brigades might be cut. After the rain on the night of 28th/29th the weather had become much brighter and the ground was drying fast—a fact which would facilitate cross-country movements. Now, the Division above all things wished that cross-country movement were impossible. All the same, the retreat must not be too rapid, for the Sappers had to have time to destroy the roads thoroughly and blow up all those stores of captured ammunition, petrol and food which had not already been removed. If the Division were prepared

to abandon everything it could get clear easily, as the Italians had done; but in this, the Division's first experience of the most difficult operation of war, all were determined to make the Germans realise that the 4th Indian Division was just as much to be feared in retreat as in attack.

On the morning of January 30 great news came over the air. The 7th Brigade was well on its way to safety! Enormously cheered, the two other Brigades began to drop back along the Jebel roads. There was no contact with the enemy all day, but air reconnaissance showed considerable forces moving up from Benghazi, and also a number of hostile parties making for Marawa, thirty miles east of Barce, from the desert. Marawa was held by the Cameron Highlanders while the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles were at D'Annunzio.

A Fighting Withdrawal

On January 31 the orders were to retire to Slonta on the southern road and Gaf Tartagu on the northern, the movement taking place during the night. At Marawa a force of lorried infantry attempted to by-pass the Camerons and cut the road to the east. The Highlanders dealt with this attempt summarily and the enemy withdrew to lick its wounds. After a number of bridges had been blown up and the road mined, the Camerons dropped back on Slonta. At D'Annunzio, on the northern road, a force of two German armoured cars and lorried infantry came feeling their way cautiously eastward. They were met by point-blank fire from anti-tank guns and one car was destroyed. The Raj Rif sent out a tank hunting party and destroyed the other and also discovered that every single German in the party, some fifty strong, was dead. That evening as Outram's began to withdraw, a sudden rush of lorried infantry headed by tanks came over the ridge to the east of the village.

But the enemy was dealing with old hands and the attack was blown back, leaving one German tank in flames.

During the evening air reports placed a substantial enemy force moving east on the trails to the south of Faidia. This appeared to be a threat to Carmusa and Martuba in rear of the Division, and would be a very serious danger if allowed to carry out this intention. The 1/6th Rajputana Rifles moved forward to Martuba and "E" Force rattled, shook and smoked across in its ancient creaks, to block the track leading into Jovanni Berta. That night the two Brigades successfully disengaged and reached their new line.

Next day pressure increased considerably. The 2/5th Mahrattas were engaged at Slonta, where enemy forces were attempting to get round both flanks. Both attempts were defeated and the enemy sheered off to the south, obviously endeavouring to get behind this Indian rearguard. The battalion, however, disengaged successfully and came back through the Camerons to Faidia, without suffering loss.

At 2 p.m. the Cameron Highlanders were digging in along the forward slopes of a bushy hillside overlooking a densely covered valley near Faidia. It was not an ideal situation. As Lance-Sergeant S. Gray, D.C.M., M.M., laconically put it in his report:—"There were flowers everywhere—a field of flowers but no field of fire. A mile away the road vanished over a hill. We kept our eyes fixed on that point." A very heavy engagement took place between the Highlanders and a large force of German lorried infantry. The engagement continued until dark, when the Camerons successfully disengaged and set off back. During this fight very heavy losses were inflicted on the Germans, a fact that was to stand the 11th Brigade in good stead next day.



Sergt. A. Campbell, M.M., Cameron Highlanders

Sergeant Gray of the Camerons writes with such a lively pen that his account of his part in this action will be quoted in full.

"About 3.30 p.m. they arrived. An armoured car and a tank followed by lorries came streaming over the top. Twenty Kittyhawks paid no attention and cruised above us as if on Bank Holiday. The lorries stopped on the top and the tank and armoured car came on and on, watched breathlessly by everyone, until they got neatly picked off by an anti-tank gun as they came round the last corner—nicely within Bren range. The crews only ran a yard or two!

"Then the party started. The Germans deployed well out of range, got their mortars, machine-guns and a battery going, and pushed stuff over and into our hill without stopping. Meanwhile one could see the infantry dodging about in the bushes on the hillside. Things looked ugly, as presumably we were on a last-man-last-round racket, and it was going to be a night party. No wire and a five hundred yard platoon front!

"But as dusk fell word came to thin out at 7.15 p.m. and leave by 7.30 p.m.—a big relief as there seemed to be a lot of Germans. By 7 p.m. it was dark and I went out to bring in one of the forward sections.

"I went off down the hill and saw some people coming my way. So I shouted 'Is that McKay's section?' 'Yes,' came the answer. So I went on to tell them to sit on top of the hill. I came nearer them and felt that something was wrong. Something was! A large German jumped out from behind a bush and pinned me before I could think. Then a German and an Italian officer came running up, took my rifle and equipment off me, stuck automatics in my stomach and back, while the Italian, speaking perfect English, said 'Lead us to your comrades; tell them to surrender and you will be well treated.' I feigned sickness and

stupidity and asked for water, but got kicked in the stomach by the German and pushed up the hill. There seemed no alternative, so I pointed to my left and the German ordered his platoon to go off in that direction, presumably to do a flanking movement. I started off up the hill, with the officers on either side, and stumbling in the dark, managed to bring my platoon well onto my flank. Then I aimed for their position, which I could just distinguish in the dark. I heard a Jock say 'Here the b——s come.' Then the Italian said 'Shout to them to surrender.' So I shouted 'McGeogh, McGough' (I knew he was a good shot), got within ten yards of them, shouted 'Shoot!' and fell flat. The boys shot and got the German in the head and the Italian in the stomach. Grand! So off I ran and rejoined the platoon. By then we were long past our withdrawal time; so back we went and after a bit of bayonet work by the rear platoon, jumped into lorries and drove off with the Germans lining the road behind us, popping at us at point blank range."

Concurrently with this attack at Faidia, a second enemy force crossed the well-cultivated Beda Littoria area and appeared on the front of the 5th Brigade, which was now covering the Cirene cross-roads. As orders had been issued for both Brigades to retire to the line of Derna-Carmusa, the evacuation of administrative installations from Derna was hastened and demolitions prepared. All along the roads to the east, captured enemy ammunition dumps began to spring into the sky with ear-breaking blasts and parachutes of smoke and flame.

The Action at Carmusa

Soon after dawn on February 2, it became apparent that the enemy was being constantly reinforced from the desert in rear of the Indian Division's withdrawal. Between Mekili and the end of the Jebel there are

several trails through which transport can wriggle northwards. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the rearguards to disengage. The 11th Brigade therefore accelerated its retirement along the main road to Carmusa. During the morning they occupied the road junction near Jovanni Berta, where the main Mekili trail comes in from the south. Later in the day it was discovered that enemy forces were pushing up northwards still further east, almost on a direct bearing for Derna. The Camerons, however, in the mood of Sergeant Gray, who ended his sprightly commentary with the remark "when we left Faidia we reckoned that by tea-time to-morrow we would be busy again," were not greatly worried, as they knew two companies of the 3/1st Punjab Regiment, covered by 52nd Battery of the 1st Field Regiment, to be established twelve miles behind them, south of the main road. With their line of withdrawal secured by this force, the 11th Brigade were prepared to deal with any other advance either from the south or west.

Throughout that morning the Punjabis had been digging in. They were resting at noon, when a stream of lorries was observed approaching along the road, headed by a British cruiser tank. As the Camerons and Mahrattas were known to be in that direction, and the vehicles were recognised to be British, they were allowed to drive up to the road blocks unmolested. Suddenly Germans poured out and closed with the astonished Indians. A group of tanks which had kept under cover now appeared and swinging round the north flank headed for the guns. The guns were alert and went into action, but the infantry overran them under cover of heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. In fifteen minutes the position was lost, and except for a handful of men, who dived into the underbrush and made their way back to Gazala on foot, there were no survivors. There were six 25-pounders with 52nd Battery ; one escaped, two were knocked out but the

other three were utterly destroyed by their crews before they were actually secured by the enemy.

It was two hours before Brigadier Anderson had pieced together the situation. By this time the enemy were swarming on all sides of the Cameron Highlanders and the Mahrattas. The action that afternoon along the Carmusa road was worthy of the best traditions of the 4th Indian Division. The roads both to the south and the east had been cut and enemy tanks were pressing towards Martuba. The seizure of the Martuba cross-roads would isolate the 5th Brigade, which had now completed the destruction of Derna and was dropping back towards Tmimi. The 11th Brigade could not, therefore, take to the desert and find their way out to the south. They must fight their way back in order to contain the enemy's strength, until the 5th Brigade could withdraw beyond the vital cross-roads at Martuba.

These two great battalions, the Camerons and the Mahrattas, therefore, dropped back down the road grimly, with enemies before them, behind them, and on both flanks. With them was the 144th Field Regiment. These territorials put up the fight of their lives, retiring troop by troop as though on manœuvres, taking cover in every patch of scrub and smashing viciously at every attempt of the enemy to close. They went into action here, there and everywhere, firing north, south, east and west. When small parties of the enemy managed to rush in under the guns, the Mahrattas and Camerons met them with bullet and bayonet, and made an end of every attack. In addition the 18th Field Company, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, volunteered to go into the line. The offer was accepted and these sappers fought alongside the infantry throughout the day.

Meanwhile the 11th Battery of the 1st Field Regiment was fighting an even more desperate action

south of Carmusa. It had been moving forward to the support of the two companies of the 3/1st Punjabis and 52nd Battery, when that tragedy occurred. The gunners saw about four hundred motor vehicles coming through the Punjabis and immediately swung into action. Although there was no infantry to cover them, down went the trails, back slipped the tractors, and within a minute the guns were firing at a range of only fourteen hundred yards. The enemy stopped and about half his force disappeared to the south and east. This threat of envelopment was a constant source of worry, and caused the Battery to withdraw. All that afternoon these gunners, who had been joined by a troop of the 65th Anti-tank Regiment, a Bofors A.A. gun and the 25-pounder of the 11th Battery that had escaped, smashed back at the advancing and enveloping enemy. Four times each troop moved and came into action again, covering each other's withdrawal. The Germans became chary of trying to close with these fierce gunners, fighting contrary to all the accepted canons of military science.

On their way back they passed through two companies of the 2/5th Mahrattas, who had hurried to prevent the enemy reaching the vital cross-roads. The Indians and gunners joined together to hurl death and destruction at the oncoming Germans. On the track itself was a captured Breda anti-tank gun, manned by Mahrattas under Naik Narayan Surwase. This gun, which had no shield to protect the men laying and firing it, knocked out a German Mark III tank and several lorries at six hundred yards range before it was instructed to retire. Late in the afternoon the 11th Battery, the Mahrattas and the other members of this gallant little force passed through the Camerons on the Martuba road and the action was over. The 11th Battery had fired more than one thousand rounds and had no ammunition left. The enemy had suffered very heavily, and the pounding they had received taught

them to close with the "Red Eagle" Division with care.

The End of the Retreat

This brilliant rearguard action by the 11th Brigade served its purpose in that it sucked into the fighting enemy forces, which otherwise would have exploited the destruction of the Punjabis by seizing the Martuba cross-roads. When night fell, it was still possible for the 5th Brigade to retire to Tmimi by open road. The hard-fighting 11th Brigade were able to take to the desert and to make their way into the Tmimi position. On February 3, therefore, General Tucker was able to assemble his command in and around Tmimi. The 5th Brigade held the right sector, the 11th Brigade the left, while "E" Force was in rear. The 1/6th Rajputana Rifles were outside the perimeter, a few miles away, trying to establish contact with the Free French and Poles.

The 11th Brigade, in particular, was cheered this day by a new arrival. After its experiences in the battle at Alem Hamza, its fighting on the coastal plain and its long march back to Tobruk with the 7th Brigade, the 31st Field Regiment was badly in need of a refit and rest.

It had only six guns left. But its friends, the 11th Brigade, were in difficulties, and the gunners asked permission to go forward and join the 4th Division. The request was refused but Colonel Claud Goulder would not take no for an answer. The 31st Field Regiment rejoined the Division and fought its way back to Acroma with its friends.

At 3 p.m. the enemy was thickening on the main road approaching the 5th Brigade, and shortly afterwards advanced on the sector held by the 1/1st Punjab Regiment, with a strong infantry attack. The field regiments had carefully ranged all approaches and

everyone was ready. Those Germans who managed to get through the storm of shells were mown down by the Punjabis. The attack got nowhere.

For the rest of the short winter day the Division was busy with destruction. The numerous landing grounds were cut up and sown with "Crow's-feet." At night the withdrawal began again. The 5th Brigade moved down the main road, with the 1/1st Punjabis covering the movement. This battalion staged a successful counter-attack to enable itself to disengage. A huge petrol dump blazed, lighting up the countryside for miles around, but fortunately the road was in a slight depression and so enemy aircraft were not able to spot the congestion of vehicles.

The 11th Brigade, moving across the desert, encountered some of the roughest going in its much travelled career. It took six hours to cover ten miles, the lorries being "bellied" with all four wheels in the air on some occasions. The 5th Brigade, moving a bit further west on the way forward six weeks before, had found this country difficult enough by daylight. In the dark it was a veritable nightmare. One column was chased by tanks until the terrain grew too abominable even for tracks and the enemy pressure relaxed. By midday on February 4 both Brigades had reached the Acroma position in the scrubby desert to the southwest of Tobruk. The long retreat was over.

The Jebel had been lost, but not a great deal else. The retreat had been timed to allow for all essential destruction. The enemy had been allowed to take the shock of meeting strong rearguards but had never been allowed to come to grips. Barring the sad over-running of two companies of the 3/1st Punjab Regiment and 52nd Battery, losses had been very reasonable. The total was only in the region of five hundred, of which about three hundred had been lost at Carmusa, and the Camerons in particular had taken a heavy

toll for the fifty men their continuous fighting had cost them. A few nights of undisturbed sleep—to fight by day and flit by night is a tremendous strain on any troops—and the 5th and 11th Brigades were ready for action once more.

Little mention has been made of the transport drivers during this retreat. Not only were there the drivers of the unit transport, but also of the R.I.A.S.C. lorries bringing food, water, petrol and ammunition. The roads were frequently wide enough to enable the vehicles to “double bank,” but all through it was noticeable how there was no double banking, no excessive speeding and distances kept meticulously. All behaved as if they were on manoeuvres instead of taking part in a somewhat tricky retreat. And the fighting men will demand that the British R.A.S.C. drivers of the troop-carrying transport should also receive full measure of praise. Frequently under fire they always waited for their passengers, even in cases like that of Sergeant Gray, where they waited until long after the appointed time, with fighting going on all around them, and then drove steadily and skilfully under fire through the pitch black night. The infantry, both British and Indian, grew to love and trust their British transport drivers and were distressed when the time came to say good-bye to them.

The new British defensive position ran south-west from the sea coast at Gazala for fifteen miles to Alem Hamza, well remembered by the 4th Division. From there it swung south-east to Bir Hakeim. The moment that the Indian Division crossed this line enemy pressure ended. A period of stalemate started while both sides built up their strength for another attempt.

A Sting in the Tail

At once the 4th Division began to build defences, lay mines and go through all the monotonous work of preparing a defensive position. But the Division was

due for a rest, far overdue. Ever since August 1940 the Division had been constantly in the desert or in Eritrea. The casualties had to be replaced, new equipment and vehicles issued, and the whole trained up to the high standard of its predecessors. On February 16 orders for relief were received. The 50th Northumbrian Division, which was also to gain a great name in this desert fighting, took over, but it was not until early April that the whole of the 4th Indian Division at last reached the Delta and comfort. It left a sting behind it. A fitting farewell was supplied by Captain A. J. Oldham, M.C., and ten men of the 2/5th Mahratta Light Infantry, together with two Bombay Sappers and Miners. This patrol set out on February 22, the night that the 11th Brigade was relieved, to raid Martuba aerodrome, a distance of more than sixty miles by compass bearing behind the enemy lines.

Some miles short of the airfield the two trucks were left behind, with orders to wait until the 26th and then if the party had not returned to set out home; the remainder proceeded on foot on their mission. Throughout February 24 the party lay doggo a short distance from Martuba. When night fell the raiders closed on the aerodrome. Reconnaissance revealed that there was only one damaged aircraft on the field, although several total wrecks had been made up as dummies to attract bombs, so the party returned to hiding. All next day they watched planes landing and leaving Martuba airfields. That night the party divided into groups of two men each, crept between some anti-aircraft posts and moved across the 'drome in the darkness. They found three new M.E. 109's nestling amongst the wrecked aircraft. Explosives with time fuses were fixed, and the party faded back into the darkness. A few minutes later a series of explosions, followed by a very big bang, shook the night. All the charges had exploded and although it was certain that the bomb dump had gone up, they did

not know if the planes had in fact been destroyed, but Oldham could wait no longer.

When heads were counted at the rendezvous Havildar Babu Jadhao and Sapper Ram Chandra Ghag were found to be missing. The party went back to where they had left the trucks, but by the time they arrived it was already past the time when the drivers had been told to leave. They had gone, but they had concealed one of the trucks deep down in the wadi. The party left food and water for the two missing men, set out home and eventually arrived in the British lines safely.

On March 7, when the Mahrattas had withdrawn to Sollum, Havildar Babu Jadhao and Sapper Ram Chandra Ghag walked in and were able to confirm that all three aircraft had been destroyed. On leaving the airfield at Martuba they had become lost in the darkness. They set out to walk back across enemy territory by night only, without food and with only a little water found in rain puddles. They bumped into the enemy positions opposite Gazala and turned south. There they met with Sowar Deep Chand and the whole made their way back to safety. They reported clean, shaven and smiling.

T W E L V E

Libya—The Storm Breaks

FROM March until May there was a lull in Cyrenaica. During this period both the British and Axis forces organised feverishly for the trial of strength to come. More and more British troops flooded into Libya; Indian forces were particularly increased. The 4th Indian Division was relieved in March, and its Brigades departed for three different destinations. The 7th Brigade went to Cyprus, the 5th Brigade to Palestine and the 11th Brigade proceeded to the Canal Area. The 5th Indian Division, which relieved the 4th Indian Division in the desert, had led a wandering life since the conclusion of the Eritrean campaign. From East Africa it had gone to Iraq, and thereafter to Cyprus. On arrival in the Middle East the Division was brought up to full strength by the addition of battalions of the Worcestershire Regiment and 9th Jat Regiment. Jarabub's Force, having been relieved by the Fighting French, completed the 29th Brigade. Early in May General Mayne left the 5th Division for another command, and Brigadier H. R. Briggs, of Benghazi fame, took over.

The 10th Indian Division were likewise under orders for Libya. This Division, arrived in the Persian Gulf in May 1941. It took part in the defence of Habbaniyah and afterwards in the capture of Baghdad.

Afterwards it participated in the short Persian campaign; one column under the Divisional Commander, Major-General W. J. Slim, raced across country to seize Teheran. On arrival in the Middle East, the 10th Division was under command of Major-General T. W. Rees, former commander of the 10th Brigade of the 5th Division.

With the new infantry came great supplies of material. British Supply Services strained every nerve to assemble sufficient strength to put the issue beyond doubt. After the first shock of Pearl Harbour, the United States went resolutely to work, with the determination to play a full partner's part on every Allied battlefield. The Eighth Army had failed to make an end of Rommel because he had more and better armour. The United States could remedy that. On the vast manufacturing floors of Detroit the assembly shops no longer spewed out shiny streamlined vehicles, but uncouth monsters with thick armour and squat heavy guns. The tanks were coming, and the Middle East had priority in deliveries.

More planes were coming, both British and American: Spitfires at last, which could out-climb and fight the Messerschmidts at any height. In Britain, behind high fences and on piqueted ranges, they were giving the last tests to a new gun—the six-pounder—which was due to be to the tank what the torpedo is to the battleship—the deadliest of enemies. The first eight hundred of these guns were earmarked for the Middle East. When they arrived . . .

How much Rommel knew of these things is conjecture. But they probably gave him plenty to think about. His day of surprise was nearly over. Ceiling and climb maximums had been reached in the air. Tanks could not carry heavier armour or guns without paying in manoeuvrability and in range. There was no better artillery to be made for desert



Dust-storm in the desert.

fighting than the 88-mm. gun. Indeed at the end of the three months' lull, General Rommel, in auditing his resources, must have realised that for the first time he would soon face an enemy with greater material strength than his own.

Thus while the Axis and British forces prepared defensive positions the thoughts of both were on attack. It was a question of who would be ready first. By the beginning of May it was evident that the Axis stood to win the race. Only a few squadrons of heavy American tanks had arrived at Suez. Bayonet prodding was still the British method of raising mines. The first of the 6-pounder guns had just arrived in the Middle East, which meant that a month must elapse before they could be put into action. On the other side, Intelligence reported that the villages of the Jebel were crammed with new Axis troops. It was known that Benghazi was landing two thousand tons of war material daily, as against five hundred tons daily in March. A high German officer in a Balkan capital in his cups gave the date of the Axis attack as May 27.

The 3rd Indian Motor Brigade

The first shock of the new battle fell on the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade. This Brigade had been in the Middle East since January 1941, and comprised the 2nd Royal Lancers, the 11th Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry and the 18th King Edward VII's Own Cavalry. It had given a fine account of itself at Mekili in April 1941,* and thereafter the 18th Cavalry in Tobruk and the P.A.V.O. on the frontier had been busy.

By the end of August 1941 the Brigade was concentrated and re-equipped at Mena. Early in September it proceeded to the Deir-ez-Zor district in north-east Syria, where unrest existed as aftermath of

* The story of Mekili is told in "The Tiger Strikes."

the overthrow of the Vichy administration. The Fighting French forces in the area were few in number and the Arab Sheiks were proving unruly. A certain amount of armed truculence hampered road construction and handicapped Allied efforts to install an effective administration. The arrival of the 3rd Motor Brigade wrought a change. In the face of close British and Fighting French co-operation, relations with the Arabs rapidly improved and in a short time the district became tranquil.

Early in February 1942 the Brigade moved back to Egypt. Here it received anti-tank guns and Bren-carriers. The next three months were spent in intensive training in the desert and during this period the 2nd Field Regiment of Indian Artillery arrived. It was one of the first Indian gunner units to reach the Middle East.

The Brigade's first task was coast protection near Matruh. But sterner work was in store. On May 22 orders arrived. Two days later Brigadier Filose reported to Headquarters of the 7th Armoured Division in the forward area and was ordered to occupy and defend the locality at Point 171, about two miles south-east of the Bir Hakeim box. The Brigade's function was that of a pivot around which British armoured forces could operate in the event of the enemy moving to outflank the Gazala line.

On May 25, air reconnaissance revealed a heavy drift of German transport towards the southern end of the British line. Next day the three Indian regiments, less their armoured carriers which had yet to arrive, took up battle positions in square formation. The 2nd Royal Lancers held the southern, the 18th Cavalry the western and the P.A.V.O. the northern face of the box. The eastern face was held by troops of Sappers and Miners and two troops of anti-tank guns of the 2nd Indian Field Regiment. The gunners

occupied the centre of the square. A British troop of six Bofors anti-aircraft guns joined the Brigade that evening and were likewise placed in the square. Each regiment had two troops of 2-pounder anti-tank guns of its own.

The total number of guns available for the Brigade was twenty-four field guns (25-pounders), thirty anti-tank guns (2-pounders) and six Bofors anti-aircraft guns. There had not been time to lay any anti-tank mines.

By 8 p.m. on May 26 reports from scouts revealed that large enemy columns were moving to the south and south-east behind a screen of armoured cars. The 3rd Motor Brigade therefore spent the night digging in. In the early hours of the morning enemy aircraft dropped flares along a line to the west and south-west of the Brigade's position, indicating the forming up positions of enemy formations. Much noise of transport and tanks could be heard.

The Battle of Point 171

At first light patrols reported large columns of armour and guns drawn up in front. By 6.15 a.m. on May 27 it was sufficiently light to make a more detailed reconnaissance and by 6.30 a.m. the Brigade Commander was able to report that the whole of the Afrika Korps was drawn up on his front "as if for a ceremonial parade." The enemy battle line from the right (i.e., the extreme south-east) was first the 90th Light Division, then the 15th Panzer Division, thereafter the 21st Panzer Division and finally the Ariete Armoured Division. It was the last named and some of the 21st Division that was facing the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade.

Brigadier Filose decided that he, and not the enemy, should open the battle. At 6.40 a.m. the guns of the 2nd Field Regiment opened fire, the first time

they had fired "in anger." The shelling caused considerable confusion in the ranks of the Ariete Division and forced their soft-skinned vehicles and guns to withdraw. The tanks, however, remained and were seen forming for attack.

Shortly after the guns opened fire the remainder of the enemy forces began to move. The distant mutter of engines swelled to a roar. All the panzers had been facing east; now they wheeled half left and swung up north and north-east. This wheel brought some of their tanks and guns along the east face of the Indians' position, held by the sappers and anti-tank gunners. These men engaged the enemy from close range and forced him further to the east. In this fight several tanks were knocked out, but so were all the guns, and Major Burt, the detachment commander, was killed. These gallant gunners fought right on to the end. There was Havildar Mohan Singh who, wounded himself with all the other members of the gun crew dead around him, kept his gun in action alone. Loading, laying and firing, he knocked out two tanks single-handed before he himself fell dead across the gun he had served so faithfully. There was Havildar Bahadur Khan, caught in the open when moving his gun into position, who fought the tanks with no cover at all, hitting three before his gun was finally put out of action. There were Havildar Ghulam Ali and Lance-Naik Yesudas, who fought their guns till all were down. It would be possible to go on telling of these gunners, but space forbids. They accomplished their task and the eastern face was not again threatened.

The first big tank attack was launched by the enemy at about 7.15 a.m. It was directed against the west and south-west faces of the position, and was greeted by the fire of the anti-tank guns of the 2nd Lancers and 18th Cavalry, and also by the leading troops of 25-pounders. Over sixty tanks took part in

the rush ; hit after hit was scored on them. So fierce was the fire that the panzers turned away to the north and north-west. They overran the 18th Cavalry and the P.A.V.O., inflicting heavy casualties on the anti-tank guns and taking many prisoners. The tanks cut their way through the Brigade's position and lumbered away to the north in the direction of Acroma, leaving many behind them.

Men armed with rifles and Bren-guns can do little when tanks overrun a position in daylight, especially if there has been no time to dig in properly. But among other deeds of bravery there was a sowar of the P.A.V.O., who jumped onto a tank, trying to wrench open the hatch and get at the men inside, and there was a daffadar of the 2nd Royal Lancers, who was killed while hacking at the tracks of a panzer with a pickaxe.

Hardly had the first wave of panzers gone when another and much heavier attack was launched by over two hundred German and Italian tanks. They came rumbling up towards the south face of the position, held by the Royal Lancers. They were greeted by a hail of fire from all remaining anti-tank guns and the forward guns of the 2nd Field Regiment. The first to meet the enemy was an anti-tank gun manned by the 2nd Lancers. One by one the men became casualties under the hell of shells and bullets, until only Lance-Daffadar Ali Mahboob Khan remained. He continued to fire the gun alone. How well he fought was proved by his success. Around his battered and broken gun a week later was found the wreckage of six heavy tanks, so damaged that the Germans had not considered them worth salving. Two had been destroyed within fifty yards of the lancer's gun.

For forty-five minutes chaos reigned. The Indian Artillery faced targets such as every gunner dreams about, but only sees once in a lifetime. There were

groups of tanks on all sides as the artillery fire split up their organised formations. The battlefield was a mass of wreckage, enemy tanks knocked out and on fire, anti-tank guns overrun and crippled, soft-skinned vehicles ablaze and disabled. Panzers crawled all over the position. Given enough anti-tank guns, and the whole course of the battle might have been altered—but thirty 2-pounders could not stop two hundred tanks. Yet the panzers could not pierce the inner core of 25-pounders, and when they finally crashed through, the field guns were still in action.

The three Indian cavalry regiments had ceased to exist. Every anti-tank gun had been knocked out. The tanks had crawled over each regiment's position in turn and had picked up the majority of those who were armed only with small arms. Yet there was no mass surrender and many went down fighting to the last. Daffadar Risal Singh of the 2nd Royal Lancers was one of those captured and was ordered to climb onto a tank, carrying him into captivity. When the tank was engaged by the Indian field guns, Risal Singh jumped off and raced to an unattended truck. Just as he was going off in it he saw some more sowars, collected by the enemy, but without a guard. He drove over, packed them into the back and started again. In a moment he saw some more soldiers in a broken down truck. He filled the second truck, attached a tow rope and drove his procession out with Brigade Headquarters.

While the battle was at its height a handful of carriers of the 18th Cavalry under Lieutenant Gillingham, which had just reached the battlefield, charged to certain death in a gallant but unavailing effort to rescue their comrades. The anti-tank guns of all the regiments had engaged scores of panzers at point-blank range and accounted for many of them. Many crews of these guns had been killed to the last

man. In the centre of the tank attack stood Admiral Sir Walter Cowan, Bart., who was still "Naval Liaison Officer" with the 18th Cavalry though many miles from the sea. He had become a legendary figure in the desert—a symbol of valour and chivalry. He and the gallant Colonel Fowler of the 18th Cavalry were called on by two enemy tanks at a few yards range to surrender. "Dog," replied the Admiral, "I will NOT surrender!" He emptied his revolver at the tanks and was unarmed when bodily seized with Fowler and carried into captivity. He was repatriated in 1943, having proved a most intractable prisoner.

Now the enemy armour began to withdraw and in its place masses of infantry appeared on the forward edge of the position. The Brigade Commander was then forced to review the situation. Five of the six troops of the 2nd Field Regiment were still in action, but the guns had fired nearly all their ammunition. An average of only four high explosive shells, sixteen smoke shells per gun remained, and there was no armour-piercing ammunition left at all. All the anti-tank guns were destroyed and most of the cavalry mopped up. Such carriers as had reached the battlefield had been knocked out. One troop of Sappers and Miners was still in action, together with Advanced Brigade Headquarters and a few signallers. As it was apparent that no help from outside could be expected, the Brigadier decided to save the guns and gave orders to withdraw to a rallying point in the rear. Five troops of the Field Regiment pulled out successfully, but two of them attached themselves to columns in the vicinity, which proved to be enemy. The remnants of the 3rd Motor Brigade was, in fact, withdrawing through a maelstrom of Axis forces. In spite of this, Brigade Headquarters and Signals, half the Field Regiment, the six Bofors guns, the troop of Sappers and Miners and odd remnants of the regiments, after running the gauntlet between the enemy columns

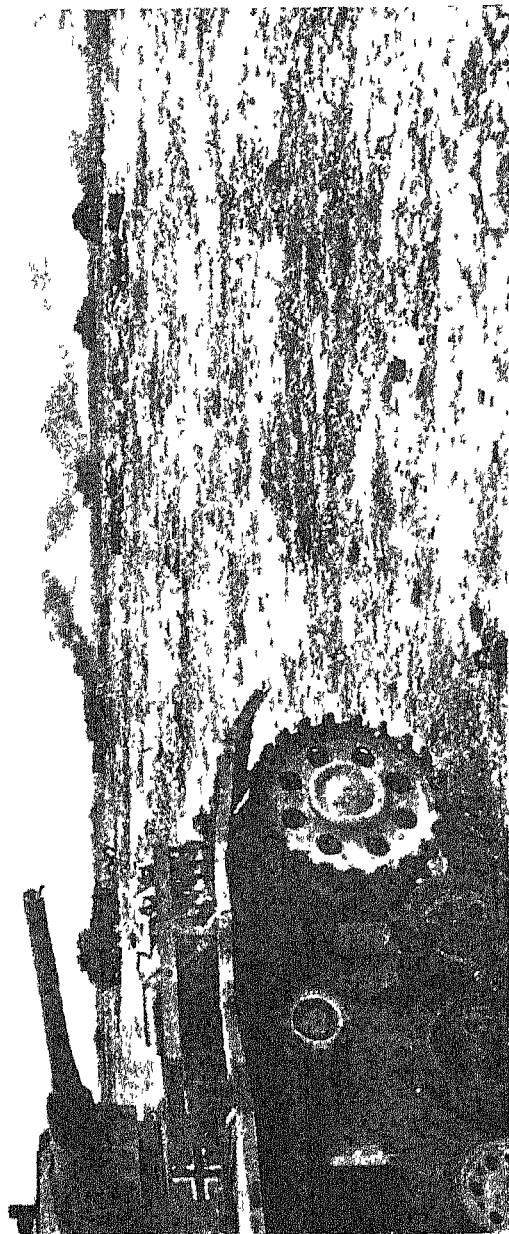
for several hours, made their way to the south-east and rejoined British forces that evening.

In those three hours of fierce combat the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade had been destroyed. Eleven officers and more than two hundred other ranks had been killed while very many more had been wounded. About thirty officers and nearly a thousand men had been taken prisoner. The enemy, however, had paid a price. Fifty-two enemy tanks were strewn over the Brigade's battle position. German workshops were able to repair some, but many had been irreparably damaged. The rear echelons of the Brigade, the ambulances, transport and workshop sections had been under fire and in danger of being cut off, but all managed to escape. Those carriers which had not arrived in time also were saved.

On May 28 the bits and pieces of the Brigade moved to Buq Buq to reorganise. Well within a fortnight they had the pleasure of greeting most of their lost comrades. The bag of prisoners had proved too much for a rapidly advancing enemy. For forty-eight hours the men were held in a desert leaguer without food or water. By the 29th they were in a sorry plight. Representations were made to the captors that it would be necessary to find food and water, or to release them. As a result nearly six hundred were released and found their way to the Fighting French at Bir Hakeim, who returned them to safety. Two hundred others, held in an improvised prisoners' cage, were rescued by a British raiding column. Unfortunately none of the officers were released although three managed to escape.

Rearguard to the Eighth Army

Within ten days the Brigadier was able to report that he was organised and ready for action once again, and General Auchinleck visited the Brigade in order to congratulate them on the magnificent fight they



‘Enemy tanks were strewn over the Brigade’s battle position.’

had made. The subsequent operations of the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade in the campaign will be briefly summarised here.

On June 11, fourteen days after its great battle, the Brigade received operation orders once again. The regimental strength was greatly reduced, especially in officers. The 2nd Field Regiment, in spite of Major Kumaramangalam's effort which had resulted in three of the lost guns being recovered from the battlefield, could only put two weak batteries into the field. The Brigade moved up from Buq Buq onto the escarpment at Sollum and again came under command of the 7th Armoured Division. Two columns were formed to operate as part of the outpost line of the Eighth Army. SHERCOL, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Horsefield, included the P.A.V.O. Cavalry and a battery of the Field Regiment. BILLICOL, under command of Major Simpson, 18th Cavalry, had the other battery and the remnants of the 18th Cavalry. The 2nd Royal Lancers were held as a reserve—a very small one. A third column, JUNECOL, consisting of detachments of the Rifle Brigade, operated under command of the 3rd Motor Brigade, and the 13th D.C.O. Lancers (Lieut.-Colonel G. M. Dyer) joined as Armoured Car Regiment.

During the ten days before the fall of Tobruk, these columns acted as part of the screen against enemy forces, intent upon pushing eastwards. Following the fall of the fortress, enemy armoured columns advanced in force and the three columns were ordered back to Shefferzen, a gap in the frontier wire twenty miles south of Capuzzo.

Here the Brigade became part of the British rearguard. Enemy armour was streaming down the trails from the north-west, making for Conference Cairn and the southern flank of the escarpment position. By June 23 it was apparent that the line of the frontier could not be held. That evening the Brigade was

ordered back to Sofafi, a long night march. Billicol and Junecol reached the new line without loss, but Shercol was caught. First it ran on an uncharted minefield. In extricating itself from the mined area it bumped into an enemy force and was heavily engaged. It broke off to the north-east but, shortly afterwards, the column became bogged in soft sand. The gunners and cavalrymen worked furiously and the vehicles were extricated before dawn. At first light Shercol again ran into an enemy concentration, which opened fire at close range. The column once more withdrew to the north-east, but now found itself on the wrong side of the boundary minefields, the gaps in which were held by the enemy. Shercol came under heavy fire from two sides. Some of the P.A.V.O. managed to force their way through the mined areas, but the remainder of the column was captured and destroyed.

On that same morning the 13th Lancers found themselves in a plight similar to that of Shercol. They were in fact sandwiched between hostile forces in the north and an extensive minefield in the south, the gaps in which were securely guarded by the enemy. The Brigade Commander, realising that the escarpment to the east prevented any chance of direct withdrawal, ordered the column to shoot its way out, by moving first to the west and then to the south-west through the enemy forces. This difficult manoeuvre was skilfully carried out with moderate loss. In making this long detour, the regiment met an enemy column, charged it, destroyed four guns and took a number of prisoners.

By now the enemy invasion was flooding across the Egyptian desert and the rearguard of the Eighth Army was forced back to the Matruh area. As part of this rearguard the much mauled 3rd Motor Brigade dropped back, fighting grimly, holding the enemy where possible without committing itself to a set

engagement. In the Matruh area fresh forces were available, so the Brigade was relieved and ordered back to the Delta, to refit. It spent the night of June 27 in Fuka. For once fortune was kind to these cavalrymen. The night after they had left Fuka was overrun and its garrison, including the remains of the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, was destroyed.

Thus ended the ordeal of the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade.

THIRTEEN

The 5th Division in the Cauldron

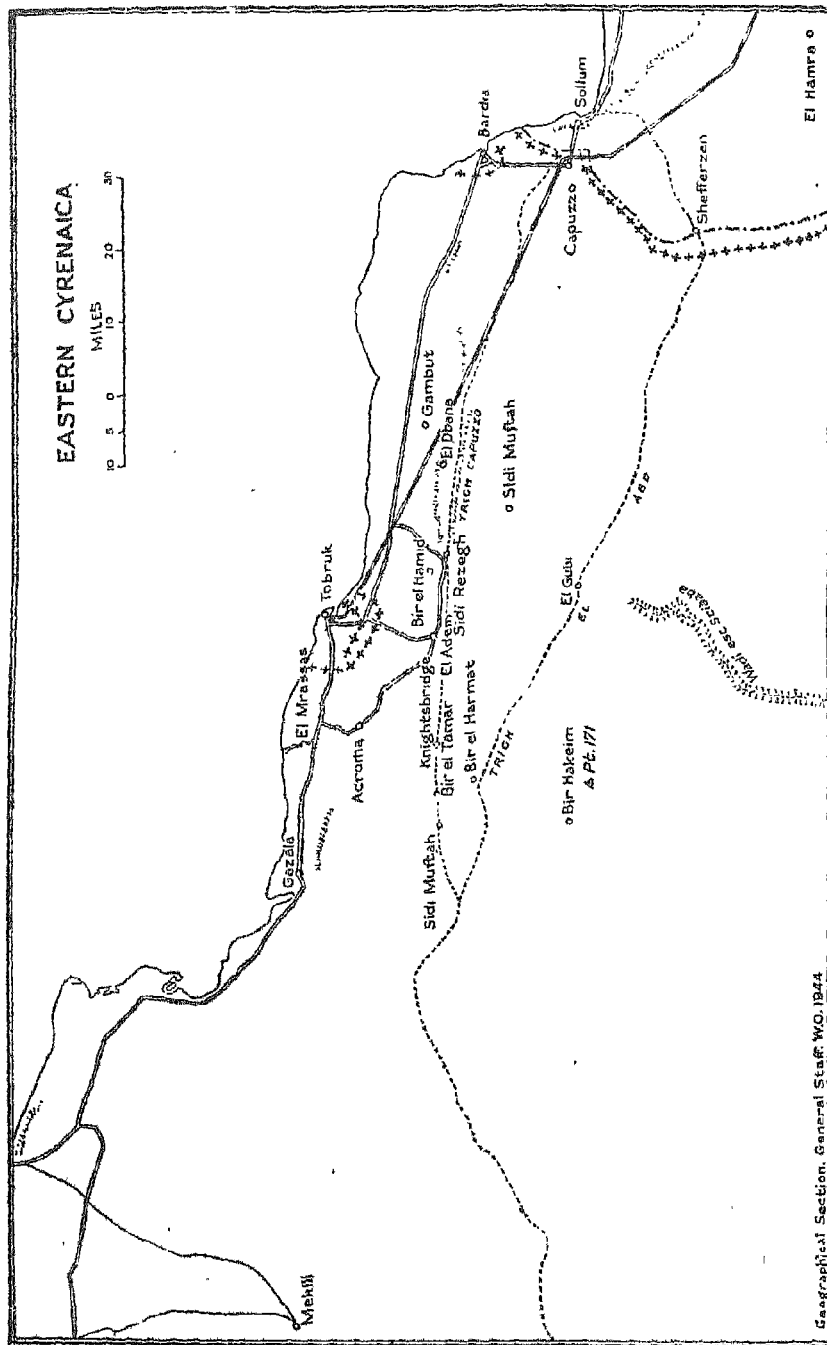
THE 5th Indian Division was thrown into the battle at the end of May. Its commander was Major-General H. R. Briggs (10th Baluch Regiment) of 7th Brigade and Benghazi fame. There were three Brigades in the Division. The 9th Indian Infantry Brigade was commanded by Brigadier B. C. Fletcher (Highland Light Infantry) and his units were battalions of the West Yorkshire Regiment, 9th Jat Regiment and 12th Frontier Force Regiment. The 10th Indian Infantry Brigade under Brigadier C. H. Boucher (3rd Gurkha Rifles) consisted of the Highland Light Infantry, 10th Baluch Regiment and 4th Gurkha Rifles. The 29th Indian Infantry Brigade was the only one of the three which had recent experience of the North African desert. It was led by Brigadier D. W. Reid (5th Mahratta Light Infantry) and in it were battalions of the Worcestershire Regiment, 2nd Punjab Regiment and 5th Mahratta Light Infantry. The Divisional Artillery consisted of the 4th and 28th Field Regiments R.A. under Brigadier C. M. Vallentin, while Lieut.-Colonel A. H. G. Napier was in charge of the Sappers and Miners. This was a very fine Division indeed, but it was strange to the peculiar ways of fighting in this desert, as two of its Brigades had spent a year in Cyprus.

From this point onwards no record will be given of the multiplicity of formations in which the Indian and British units of the Indian Divisions found themselves. The 5th Indian Division, for instance, never functioned as a whole. Sometimes it had two Brigades, sometimes one, on occasions none at all. Brigades of the 4th and 10th Indian Divisions also came under command, only to disappear again, while the gunners were for ever changing.

Battle broke on the morning of May 27. Immediately the 5th Division moved forward and disintegrated. The 9th Brigade stayed in Tobruk with the 12th Frontier Force Regiment at El Adem. The 10th Brigade moved up from Gambut and went into the Tobruk corridor, fifteen miles west of the town at El Mrassas. The 29th Brigade was attached to an Armoured Division and operated columns southward from El Adem towards El Gubi. The 11th Brigade from the 4th Indian Division, under Brigadier Anderson (Cameron Highlanders) was left behind in the frontier area, with the Cameron Highlanders under the 10th Brigade at Belhamid and El Duda. With all its Brigades scattered over many miles and no troops under command, 5th Division Headquarters withdrew to a quiet spot to the east of Tobruk in order, as the official narrative puts it, "to be out of the way."

The Battle Begins

The opening days of the battle were characterised justifiably by considerable optimism. Fifty tanks were strewn around the approaches to Bir Hakeim, and Rommel's columns had been split. The Army Tank Brigades had done great execution. Best of all, the German panzers had been identified in one group and to the east of, which is to say inside, the British minefields. The enemy petrol barges intended for refuelling had been intercepted and sunk off Gazala headland. All in all, it looked as though Rommel



was set, to translate the popular German phrase, for a "death ride," with British armour arrayed on one side of him and British minefields guarded by the 50th Division on the other.

On June 1 a statement revealed that Eighth Army Command was well satisfied. The summary stated that the Ariete Division had reeled back from the shock and that the 1st and 2nd Armoured Brigades were driving it helter-skelter to the west. The 90th Light Division had been engaged on approaching El Adem by the 4th Armoured Brigade which had scattered the Germans, causing heavy casualties. It was estimated that one hundred and fifty enemy tanks had been knocked out, and that the same number, heavily battered, was crowded against the British minefield to the north of Knightsbridge. It was believed that the enemy were endeavouring to escape to the westward. Large bodies of Germans were known to be cut off east of the minefields. "Evening fell with the enemy in utter disorder as the result of air and ground attacks," said the report in conclusion. An instruction was issued that derelict and abandoned enemy equipment east of the minefield would not be destroyed—an unmistakable indication of confidence.

Plans were made to fall upon the Italians while their guardian angels, the panzers, were occupied elsewhere. There was a great chance to seize the entrances to the Jebel and smash the enemy forces before ever the Afrika Korps could intervene.

But while these plans were still under consideration, something startling happened.

On the night of May 31/June 1, the 150th Brigade of the 50th Northumbrian Division (Major-General Ramsden), stout-fighting Tynesiders, were camped against the western edge of the British minefield at Sidi Muftah, twenty-seven miles west of El Adem. That night the Germans cut two lanes through the

British minefield some ten miles apart, on either side of the 150th Brigade, passed strong forces of armour and lorried infantry through, and fell upon the Tyne-siders with an enveloping swoop just as dawn broke. The Northumbrians stood stubbornly among their leaguers, but they had neither the gun nor the tank strength to make a serious fight of it. By afternoon the battle was over, and the 150th Brigade was bagged. Only a handful escaped.

The loss of this strong Brigade was the least of the consequences of an operation which can only be described as dexterous and audacious. With one stroke, the enemy had bridged the British moat of minefields and had thrust a pincer into the heart of the Eighth Army's defensive system. The panzer mass now had a port of supply direct upon its line of march. The two gaps in the minefield (named Peter and Paul) with the island of mines between them and the country to the east of them became known as the Knightsbridge Cauldron. A second defensive position east of the Cauldron became urgently necessary. The 29th Brigade moved immediately from El Gubi into the El Adem box, a strongly fortified ridge some fifteen miles east of Knightsbridge. By June 4 the 9th and 10th Brigades had moved southwards from the Tobruk area.

The plan of battle called for the establishment of two strong points, or "boxes," opposite "Peter" and "Paul" gaps. The northern "box" was to be located at Bir el Tamar, three miles west of Knightsbridge. The southern "box" was approximately ten miles to the south-west, two miles west of Bir el Harmat. The troops available for this operation consisted of the 7th Armoured Division and two Brigades of the 5th Indian Division, which were strengthened by a battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry from the 10th Division, and by half a battalion of the Royal

Northumberland Fusiliers from the 7th Armoured Division. Artillery under Divisional Command consisted of the 157th Field Regiment (Lieut.-Colonel Marsland) and the 107th Royal Horse Artillery (Lieut.-Colonel Seely) together with the 4th Royal Tank Regiment—modest enough gun coverage for an operation extending over ten miles. There were two other regiments of Field Artillery in reserve, under command of the 7th Armoured Division. The whole operation likewise was under command of the 7th Armoured Division. The 2nd and 22nd Armoured Brigade from Major-General Lumsden's Division were to co-operate.

Axis strength was unknown but reconnaissance parties encountered very alert outposts. Tanks were known to be east of the minefields in some force. Time was the crucial factor—to delay meant increased resistance, to hurry might mean an ill-mounted attack. Unfortunately, dispositions were such that the operation could neither be delayed nor hurried. Only at the end of four days was it possible to strike.

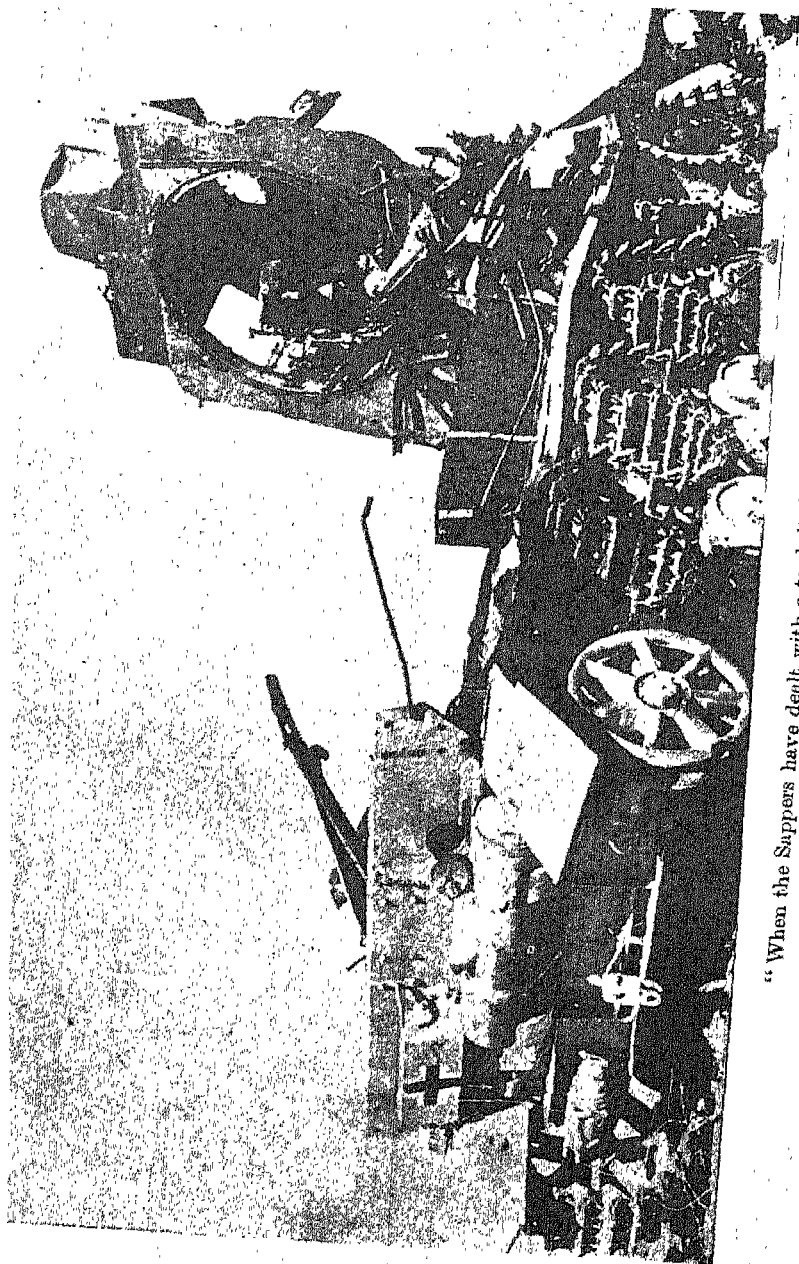
In the meantime a dashing operation by the 29th Brigade relieved Rommel of thirty tanks, making the Indian formations' bag in the first week of the attack no less than one-fifth of the entire attacking armour. The 3rd Indian Motor Brigade's stand at Bir Hakeim followed by the onslaught of British armour so shook the German commander that his panzers split into two columns, one column continuing the drive direct to the north towards the Gazala rendezvous with the petrol barges, and the other heading further east towards Tobruk. The objective of the second column has never been known, unless it was to secure fuel from British dumps; nor is the strength known, as various estimates place it as high as one hundred and eighty runners, or one half of Rommel's remaining armour; and as low as fifty tanks, which would be a looting force. But what is certain is that a considerable

number of the enemy panzers ran out of fuel about half-way between Bir Hakeim and El Adem. Scouts reported their predicament to the 29th Indian Brigade in El Adem. Immediate consent was sought to attack. There were certain delays, and air bowsters managed to refuel some of the stranded tanks. On June 2, however, a column drawn from the 2nd Punjab Regiment and the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry under the command of Major Leatherdale of the Punjabis, with batteries of 25-pounders and anti-tank guns and a section of Bombay Sappers and Miners raced off. They came upon twelve Mark IV's and thirteen Mark III's with the crews hopefully scanning the skies for the expected fuel planes. A fierce attack sent the crews scurrying in lorries, and all the tanks were captured. Major Leatherdale was keen to bring them in but German armour was known to be loose all over the desert. Brigadier Reid chose the safe way. "Bust them," was his laconic instruction. Leatherdale's reply was equally terse. "All busted," he signalled. Later in the day a second message reached the Brigadier. "Found five more. Busted also." The Sappers and Miners came in that evening well content for when they have dealt with a tank it does not run again.

It is possible that earlier action might have increased the bag, and conceivably might have altered the course of the battle.

The Knightsbridge Cauldron

At 2.50 a.m. on the morning of June 5 British Artillery opened fire on the northern gap in the Cauldron minefield as the prelude to attack by Brigadier Boucher's 10th Brigade. Ten minutes later the Highland Light Infantry and the 10th Baluch Regiment crossed the starting line. At 4.15 a.m. the Baluchis put up their success signal. They had reached their objective with little or no opposition. At 5.40 a.m.



"When the Sappers have dealt with a tank it does not run again."

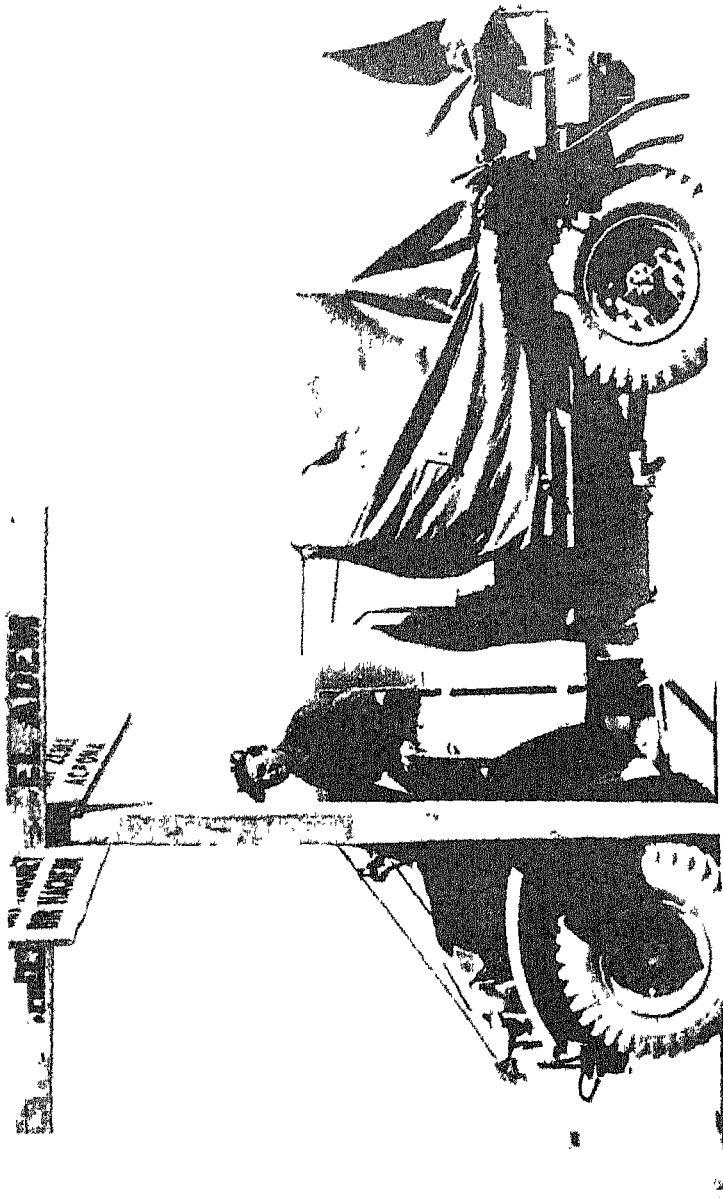
the Highland Light Infantry reported similar success, their only casualties being three lorries of troops, which had the misfortune to blunder in the dark into a German battery position, to be blown to pieces at point-blank range. Many dead Italians were found in their trenches, blasted by artillery fire.

In the first light the enemy struck back. An accurate shoot was laid down on the Highland Light Infantry and Baluch position. At 6.30 a.m. the forward company of the Highland Light Infantry was overrun by tanks and suffered heavy casualties. The 4th Army Tank Battalion, which had covered the 10th Brigade advance, had encountered no panzers and had been withdrawn before the enemy attack came. At 6.45 a.m. the 9th Brigade attack crossed its starting line, heading for the southern gap in the minefield, with the same tank battalion covering the advance of the West Yorkshire Regiment and the company of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. The attacking column reached the British minefield before encountering opposition but on reaching the gap was heavily engaged by tanks and 88-mm. guns. The West Yorkshires began to dig in immediately behind the tank screen. Unfortunately the 4th Field Regiment (Lieut.-Colonel Truscott) whose strong gun force was detailed by the 5th Indian Division to support the southern battalions in their blocking movement, was ordered by the 7th Armoured Division to move with a tank column. The West Yorkshires were left in a very exposed position, with no artillery support except a handful—eight in all—of anti-tank 2-pounders. This weakness was undoubtedly detected early in the day by the enemy. The gap in the British defences became more pronounced when the 2nd Armoured Brigade, which had been stationed on the southern flank, was drawn into the centre of the battle leaving the 22nd Armoured Brigade behind. As a result, enemy columns passed through the gap all day and probed to the south-east. By afternoon

strong columns of artillery and tanks were in the rear of the British positions.

As soon as the reconnaissance party of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry had come up, the 4th Gurkha Rifles left their reserve battle position in the southern area, and moved to the north to the support of the Highland Light Infantry. At 9.30 a.m. the commander of the 22nd Armoured Brigade reported the line of enemy anti-tank guns in the southern gap to be too strong to force. The 9th Brigade battalions were ordered to consolidate their positions. The British tank force stationed on the southern flank of the attack now moved some four or five miles to the north, to the centre of the battle area, from whence it was planned to push through the northern gap, in the direction of Sidi Muftah, in order to relieve the pressure on the heavily engaged 10th Brigade. But there is no evidence that this attack was attempted and at 10.15 a.m. the order, which already had been issued in the south—to dig in along the present holding line—was issued for the north. This projected line was some miles behind the actual gap in the minefields, a circumstance which allowed the enemy to bring his armour through the gap and deploy to the flanks. Quick to seize the opportunity, guns and tanks poured through under cover of heavy Stuka raids. Soon a force of enemy armour was roving in the north as in the south—to the east of the British minefields and on the flanks and rear of the 5th Division.

The day was excessively hot, with dust devils dancing across the plain, and mirages lining the horizon with Braille-like shapes. These mirages may have played some part in the battle, for throughout the day contradictory and confused reports compelled commanders to make repeated reconnaissances before issuing orders. On more than one occasion the infantry reported enemy tanks on their fronts when the British



Knightsbridge.

armour could not find them there. The tendency, therefore, as the day wore on, was for tanks and infantry to operate independently, which is impossible.

At 1.30 p.m. the Highland Light Infantry reported a heavy enemy force to be mustering for attack from the north and sent a last minute appeal for aid. No forces were available that could arrive in time. At 2 p.m. tanks with lorry-borne infantry in close support plunged upon the devoted Scotsmen. After eight hours of ordeal they met the attack with fine courage, and beat off the first onslaught, the little carriers fighting as tanks. A second attack twenty minutes later reached their lines and the remains of the battalion was destroyed. Yet the few men who survived came out fighting and joined the 4th Gurkhas some three miles behind their original position. Two companies and the anti-tank platoon of the Jats and a company of the Northumberland Fusiliers were already with the Gurkhas.

The West Yorkshire Regiment had in the meantime been fighting a desperate action. After the British tanks had been withdrawn the battalion was surrounded by a ring of armour at a range of about two thousand yards. The battalion's 2-pounders kept on firing until all but one had been knocked out; the armoured carriers had a brush with the enemy armoured cars and this, combined with the fire of the anti-tank guns, sufficed to make the enemy cautious. About midday Brigadier Fletcher came up and told Colonel Langran that he could retire when he liked, but that appeared to be impossible before dark—and there was another eight hours before then. The position of the Yorkshiremen appeared desperate. Yet the chance came and the battalion got back. The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry was given the task of blocking lanes through the minefield which came out near Bir el Harmat. The battalion arrived piecemeal during the afternoon

of June 5, company by company, with newly issued anti-tank guns. As the Cornishmen arrived at Bir el Harmat they were attacked by strong formations from the south and destroyed in detail after a hopeless and gallant resistance. It was a sad end to a very fine battalion which was only then completing its long march from Baghdad.

The tank force which had overrun the Highland Light Infantry continued to the south, towards the 4th Gurkha position. *En route* it encountered very heavy fire from the 157th Field Regiment, situated behind the island of mines between the two gaps and escorted by two companies of the Jats. The pressure from the north tended to force the 9th and 10th Brigades together, and they could no longer pretend to be a blocking force. A fresh position for a composite force was selected at B.742 almost ten miles east of Bir el Harmat, the starting line of that morning. The remainder of the Highland Light Infantry, the West Yorkshire Regiment and the 12th Frontier Force Regiment managed to reach this new position, all under Brigadier Fletcher. Brigadier Boucher was left to hold the front with the 9th Jat Regiment, 10th Baluch Regiment and 4th Gurkha Rifles. With them were the 4th, 28th and 157th Field Regiments with the 107th R.H.A. further in rear. All were greatly reduced in strength, unprotected by mines and inextricably mixed. It was now a soldier's battle. Command was impossible. Tanks were all round, in front, in rear and on both flanks. The gunners fought their guns to the last. The infantry refused to allow the enemy infantry to close. The Baluchis in particular fought to the very bitter end. Eight miles in rear, the West Yorkshires and the 12th Frontier Force Regiment were already under fire. Many vehicles were stampeding for safety and cataracts of dust poured upwards from the plain into the sunset sky. Through the dust-clouds the panzers lunged blindly spitting red and green tracer,

with Tommy-gunners riding on their backs raking the front. It was the kill. The combined Headquarters of the 7th Armoured Division and the 5th Indian Division were nearly overrun and command ceased to exist.

The D.C.L.I., the Baluchis and the 4th Gurkhas disappeared in the towering dust. Of the gunners few escaped. The remaining units withdrew under orders into El Adem "box." The only consolidation was that a surprising number of panzers had been destroyed.

Such are the bare facts of this mournful and unmitigated disaster, in the account of which there can be no comfort for our arms. Fortunately there is a splendid human record of the same day which recounts how British and Indian soldiers, confronted with every mischance of battle, thirst, wounds and isolation, matched their bare flesh against steel machines and stood to their duty to the last. Captain M. L. Katju, M.C., Indian Army Observer, who accompanied the 10th Brigade throughout this fateful day, wrote as follows:—

"On the night of June 4, the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade formed up to attack the Germans east of Bir el Tamar.

"The moon was late and the night was chill. A great quiet hung over the desert. A few tanks took station ahead, followed by Bren-carriers. Behind them lorry-borne infantry formed up. The men wore their greatcoats; while they waited they sat around their trucks.

"In the dark I walked among the Indian infantry. They sat over their tea, chatting quietly. A small jest, and a dozen sets of white teeth gleamed. When they spoke of the war and of this battle, they were proud men and unafraid. They would show the enemy how a good regiment could fight.

"The old moon climbed the sky and the night passed. At ten minutes to three, the night exploded with the shock of heavy guns. The earth rocked. The Baluchis shed their greatcoats, sprang into their trucks. Their hour had come. Their bayonets gleamed dully in the thin moon. Ten minutes of pounding fury; then our guns lengthened range. The Brigade moved forward.

"Without much opposition we reached our objective. The Baluchis leapt from their trucks to search the slit trenches. Our success flare went up. A few minutes later the Highland Light Infantry, which had shared the van of the attack, put up the same signal. The position was won.

"Dawn was still an hour away. Quiet fell on the desert, broken only by the coughing of the tanks, and by the clank of spades as our men dug in. The opal line of light in the east thickened. Suddenly heavy rumps burst overhead. The enemy was ranging on us with black smoke shrapnel. The battle was on.

"In front our tanks moved in and out, sparring, probing the enemy's strength. Behind us, the 28th Field Regiment came plunging up into close support. At first clear light, they opened fire. Our tanks, their jobs done, lurched back through our lines. On the outskirts of our position figures scurried from black masses, which exploded with shattering roars. Our sappers were blowing up enemy tanks. They destroyed six of them.

"The morning sun broke hotly upon uproar. Dust masses, cut by flashes, climbed into the sky. Early in the forenoon tanks began to press the Highland Light Infantry. Our guns swung left and the enemy panzers hurried out of range.

"Until now, I was of this scene, rather than in it. A passive spectator, action had flowed around me. I



Into battle—British and Indians together

joined the doctor in the Regimental Aid Post, near the Baluch battalion headquarters. He was a brave, cheerful man. As the wounded arrived, I helped him. The gunners had not had time to dig in and they began to suffer.

"An R.A.S.C. driver, waiting for orders, stood near me. He was telling me of his wife and children.

" 'It's a fair twist, sir,' he said, 'this having a home and kids, and having to come and fight in this God-forsaken place. It's hardly worth having them.'

"A heavy shell crumped overhead. A faint streak of blood showed on the driver's lips and chin. I thought he had been scratched and said something about a close call. Then I saw him grow pale. 'It's the end for me, sir,' he said, and slowly sank down. He died before the doctor could reach him.

"Over the heads of the infantry, snug in their slit trenches, battle filled the air. The enemy now pounded our guns. Gun teams, stripped to the waists, disappeared in fountains of sand. When the dust broke, men would be seen bandaging each other. Their seriously wounded came to us. We dressed them and sent them out; but by middle forenoon, our last truck had been hit and was on fire.

"In front, on both flanks, the dust clouds that sheltered the enemy tanks crept closer. Restlessly milling in and out, they waited for the death of our guns before they dared close on our infantry. One by one, salvos of shells fell upon our 25-pounders, leaving them askew, with figures strewn about. Officers came running up, and crouched, solitary figures, loading and firing. A colonel manned one gun alone.

"Shell-fire smashed in not only from the front but from both sides. A truck came dashing from our rear. A gunner officer drove. He loaded up with seriously wounded, hitched on one undamaged gun,

and hurried away. Our infantry was alone in the plain.

"The dust clouds edged up, the machine-gun bullets began to kick around us, puffing up spurts of sand. We tried to telephone for instructions, but the line was broken. Men from the H.L.I. came in for dressing. They told us the German tanks, now sure of their safety, were massing for their rush. With wounds dressed, all men fit to fight went back to face the onset.

"The doctor and I found a serviceable vehicle, loaded it with a small party of wounded, and drove across to Battalion Headquarters. We moved through breakers of dust, which rose and fell with the blast of shells. As we emerged we saw a crowd of men standing around a tank. We shouted with joy, for we were sure that our armour had come to our support. We drove across furiously. As we drew nearer, we noticed some of the men around the tank waving us away. We were within twenty yards before we realised that these men were prisoners, and that the tank was German.

"We were so close that the tank could not get its guns to bear on us. Two Germans sprang on top of the tank, firing at us with pistols. We swerved and raced off, weaving to spoil aim. Within a hundred yards the tank cannon and machine-guns opened on us. We headed into a barrage of dust clouds at racing speed. As we shot past, heads bobbed up from slit trenches to stare dazedly at us. A cannon shell hit the rear of the truck—sparks flew out. Then a sergeant beside me slumped to the floor. He had been killed instantly. The driver shouted 'The doctor's hit.' That fine, brave man had been hit again. 'Don't mind me,' he said, 'I'm finished. We must get out.'

"Tracer shell was coming at us from both sides. A tyre blew off. We swerved and raced on. Suddenly

there was no more shooting. We drew up in an open space, with no dust clouds near. We lifted out several dead and began to tie up our wounded.

“A truck bore down on us. The doctor of another Indian regiment climbed out. He adjusted some bandages, and told us to drive on. There came to us another truck, filled with Indian soldiers, under command of a jemadar. He asked for his battalion. We told him that his battalion had been engaged and that we feared that it was overrun. He need not go forward. The jemadar shook his head, he had his orders to come up and to fight. Nothing would stop him. He drove on into the battle. He was a soldier!”

FOURTEEN

The Fall Of Tobruk

THE great tank battle to the south of Tobruk, around which all other fighting eddied between June 6 and June 21, still appears of obscure design. Rommel's original intention was quite plain. If his bull's rush of four hundred tanks had reached the Mediterranean, two South African and one British Infantry Division would have been trapped and the Eighth Army would have been in peril of destruction. But after his initial vicissitudes, followed by serious day by day losses in armour, the German Commander seems for some time to have lost his grip on the battle. Behind the British minefield his tanks no longer operated under tight control but, roved here, there and everywhere in small clumps. They seemed more inclined to cause mischief than to seek a decision. Certainly there is no basis for the widely held view that Rommel brilliantly enticed British armour into a trap on the rocky shield of Acroma. "The black day of June 13" is a fiction. Only about thirty tanks were knocked out on that day.

The British plan of battle was simple and logical. If Rommel's tanks could be shepherded into the north-west, a neat cul-de-sac formed by minefields to the west, the escarpment above the coastal corridor to the north, and the defences of Tobruk perimeter

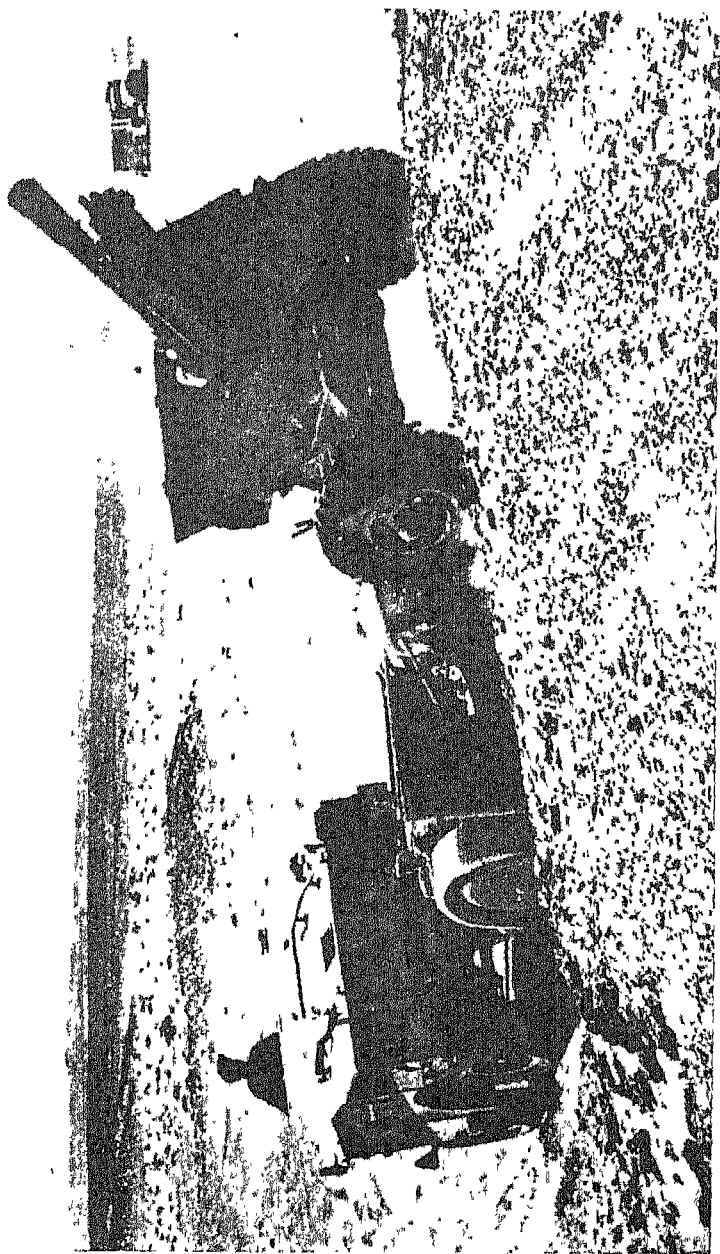
to the east, would hem them in. Behind them a series of "defended localities" would spring up to complete the cordon. Rommel, however, had no intention of being caught in this manner, and he for his part was fairly satisfied with his position. The British were in a ring about him and so, holding interior lines, he could throw his full weight at any point of the circumference. His mobile panzer columns therefore settled down to destructive forays. Between the overrunning of the 5th Indian Division on June 5 and the evacuation of the Gazala corridor on June 15, dozens of tank battles occurred. Enemy panzers turned up singly, in troops, in squadrons and in small fleets, to fall upon British columns, on "defended localities" and on rear echelons. In the very heart of the British position a hostile body began to bulge outwards in all directions against a tenuously-held perimeter.

Isolated formations, whether Brigade Groups or smaller mobile columns, were not strong enough to deal with this centrally established foe, who could fling his full weight in any direction. If immobilised in "boxes," hemmed round by a thin minefield and a few aprons of Dannert wire, with only a narrow gap for entry and exit, the scattered British forces were ripe fruit for the enemy's picking. Guns would mount guard over the entrance and thereafter artillery and Stukas would "soften up" the garrison until the defending guns were short of ammunition, and food and water were running low. Then either the defenders would have to try to break out or suddenly the panzers would come pounding in from all sides and in a short time a stream of prisoners would be leaving for the rear.

It was on such an amorphous battlefield that seven Indian Infantry Brigades now found themselves. The 5th Indian Division had suffered heavily. Its 10th Brigade had more or less ceased to exist. Only five officers and one hundred and ninety men of the

Baluchis, and one officer and one hundred and fifty-eight men of the 4th Gurkhas had escaped from Knightsbridge Cauldron, and the Highland Light Infantry had only one and a half companies left. Brigade Headquarters and the 28th Field Regiment likewise had disappeared. The 9th Brigade were in better shape as the 12th Frontier Force Regiment had not been heavily engaged and many of the troops of the other battalions had managed to extricate themselves, but they had lost much of their equipment and many officers. The 4th Field Regiment had, however, been cut to pieces. The ordeal had been such that both 9th and 10th Brigades, less the Frontier Force Regiment, were withdrawn from the battle area on June 10 and passed to the east of the frontier. The Frontier Force Regiment remained attached to 29th Brigade, which was in El Adem "box."

Of the 10th Indian Division, one Brigade on June 7 moved up from the frontier to occupy defensive positions across the Trigh-Capuzzo, and on the El Adem by-pass. The 6th Rajputana Rifles at Sidi Rezegh, the 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles at El Duda and the South Wales Borderers at Bel Hamid, covered one of the main routes to the east. Each of these areas were "defended localities," but the El Duda "box," immediately on the crest of the escarpment, was badly sited for defence, so on June 10 the Garhwalis were withdrawn to Bel Hamid. Another Brigade moved up to Gambut, the half-way house between Tobruk and Bardia. The third Brigade remained in garrison at the top of the Sollum Pass. The 11th Brigade of the 4th Division, in the meantime, had recovered the Camerons from garrison in the Bel Hamid El Duda area, and all three battalions had moved towards the Tobruk perimeter. In far-off Palestine the call reached the 5th Indian Brigade of the 4th Division, and they were quickly on the road for a thousand-mile trek back to the desert they knew so well.



Artillery on the move over typical desert country.

El Adem "box," about three miles south of El Adem cross-roads, was particularly strong, being considerably larger than most "defended localities," and also occupying a position on a ridge above the desert plain. As a base for roving columns it possessed a considerable gun force, and with four battalions of infantry in occupation, it promised to be a hard nut to crack. Unfortunately, the decision was reached to "bud off" two minor "boxes" from El Adem. On the night of June 7, the Frontier Force Regiment left to occupy a small "defended locality" at Point 650, five miles to the north-west of El Adem on the Acroma road. Next morning the Worcestershire Regiment likewise went out to build and occupy a small "box" a further ten miles to the north-west and only a few miles south of Acroma. "

This dispersion of strength was destined to have disastrous results. With his bridgehead firmly secured in Knightsbridge Cauldron, Rommel turned his attention to Bir Hakeim, and commenced an air and artillery assault which could have only one result. On June 10 the gallant Frenchmen had to evacuate this position. About 70 per cent. of them managed to escape into the desert and came into the British lines. But no sooner had Bir Hakeim fallen than reconnaissance revealed a force of approximately one hundred and thirty tanks on the move to the north-west towards El Adem.

On the same day (June 11) an ominous precursor of disaster to come occurred in a clash between the 4th Armoured Brigade and a force of German panzers. The new British tanks, the heavily armoured and heavily gunned Grants and Stewarts, engaged in a slogging match with their German adversaries, and although they knocked out six tanks, one self-propelled gun, and a number of soft-skinned vehicles, the battle cost the 4th Armoured Brigade ten Grants and three

Stewarts. The answer to the Mark III's and Mark IV's had yet to be found.

By the morning of June 12, the enemy was swarming into the El Adem-Sidi Rezegh area. On the night of June 12 General Rees of the 10th Division received news of a German concentration to the south-west of Bel Hamid, and he sent the Garhwalis out to deal with it. No trace of the reported leaguer was found, but the Garhwalis came back with one hundred and twenty-five released prisoners. Large forces of the enemy, however, were near at hand, and on June 14 when the evacuation of Gazala began, a heavy attack was mounted against the El Adem "box." From all sides shells poured in, and the Stukas began to work around the clock. Tanks appeared on the horizon and that afternoon lorry-borne infantry appeared on the front held by a battalion of the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry. The first attack was little more than a reconnaissance in force, and when the Mahrattas were found to be alert, the Germans quickly shifted on to the perimeter held by the 2nd Punjab Regiment. But in neither case was the attack pressed home. The tanks grew bolder and closed up after nightfall. Both Punjabis and Mahrattas immediately sent out patrols with "sticky" bombs and they managed to destroy a few unwary panzers which had settled down for the night. On the next day the fighting around El Adem perimeter, desultory at times and flaring up suddenly, cost the enemy many casualties. On the afternoon of June 15 German and Italian ambulances made six trips along the El Adem wire picking up wounded.

The enemy ring around El Adem had isolated the Worcesters and the Frontier Force Regiment in their small "boxes" to the north-west. Where the big El Adem "box" held the enemy at bay, the small cages failed. On the afternoon of June 15 a heavy artillery bombardment came down upon the Piffers at Point

650. The action followed the classical lines of "box" destruction. By evening every gun had been knocked out, and as night fell the tanks drove in and overran the battalion. Only a handful escaped in the darkness, the C.O., Lieut.-Colonel Dean, being among the missing.

On the same afternoon a similar attack went in upon the Worcesters at Point 187. Here a great stand was made. After hammering the enclosed area for several hours, the tanks formed up for their rush. But as they lumbered in they were met by a blaze of 2-pounder fire which left several flaming wrecks on the wire. At dawn the enemy, angered by this doughty resistance, threw a second tank attack on this gallant band. Once again the anti-tank marksmen took their toll. The Stukas were sent for and throughout the morning of June 16 the Worcesters on their few isolated acres of desert received a concentrated pasting from air and artillery alike. Yet every time that the tanks came probing out of the dust clouds, the Worcester gunners waited, and crashed shells into them. After twenty-four hours of dour and brilliant defence, ammunition, food and water were running low. That afternoon, the Worcesters managed to escape in good order into the Tobruk perimeter, setting an example of behaviour and discipline that might have been expected from the sons of fathers who saved the British line at Gheluvelt in 1914. Unfortunately their tragedy was only postponed, as only a handful escaped from Tobruk.

On the same morning (June 16) the pressure began against Sidi Rezegh. Here the Rajputana Rifles (Lieut.-Colonel J. West) occupied another "defended locality." The Sidi Rezegh position was not easy to defend, and in order to cover its perimeter all four rifle companies had to be distributed in a semi-circle along the ridge above the Trigh-Capuzzo. The 25-pounders

of the 97th Field Regiment constituted the garrison's main gun strength. For a week the Raj Rif had worked steadily, mining the approaches and digging gunpits and trenches. The enemy artillery began to register on the morning of June 16.

Large masses of enemy transport appeared on the Trigh-Capuzzo to the north-west of Sidi Rezegh. Shelling increased in intensity throughout the morning, and before noon the 90th Light Division and the 15th Panzer Division were identified in the neighbourhood. A call was put through to the R.A.F. for air support, and throughout the day Maryland bombers made fifteen sorties against enemy concentrations. Late in the afternoon when the airmen asked whether their bombs were dropping too close to the "box," the Raj Rif responded gleefully: "Your bombing is magnificent. Give us more. Salaams from all in the 'box.'" As the day wore away the attack moved towards its crescendo. Heavy and light shell, together with mortar and machine-gun fire, pinned the defenders to their slit trenches. At 7.30 p.m. with the setting sun behind them, the Germans put down a smoke barrage against the western face of the "box" and moved in to raise the minefield. Enemy artillery also shelled the Trigh-Capuzzo and the wind blew the deep dust from the tracks across the face of the "box" to give further cover. Approximately one thousand enemy infantry and a number of tanks mustered for the attack. Just as dark fell the rush came. "A" Company's position was overrun, but "D" Company swinging to the right, blew back the enemy's attempt to complete the occupation. After nearly two hours ragged fighting, the enemy gave up his endeavours to complete the capture that night and settled down to wait for morning. The Brigade, however, had no intention of leaving the enemy in a position which made the Bel Hamid "box" untenable, and immediate orders were issued for the relief of Sidi Rezegh. Before they could be put

into operation, however, the general directive ordering retirement to the line of the frontier had come through, and the remainder of the garrison at Sidi Rezegh, including twelve of the sixteen guns of the 97th Field Regiment, slipped away in the darkness and marched to the new Brigade concentration area at El Dbana, ten miles further east.

Escape by Night

Thus on the evening of June 16 only the Bel Hamid "box" of those held by the Indian Brigades remained unattacked. On that evening, in conformity to the general plan of withdrawal, Brigadier Reid was instructed to leave El Adem "box," and to make his way eastwards. With at least two German Divisions occupying the fifteen miles between El Adem and Sidi Rezegh, it was an easier order to give than to execute. The exits from the "box" were covered by enemy guns, and even if the Brigade's transport got clear of the wire and minefields, it had to cross an area stiff with enemy formations. The R.A.F. offered to aid the 29th Brigade by putting on a low level bombing and machine-gun attack, which might create sufficient noise and confusion to cover the passage of the vehicles, but for some reason or other this assistance did not materialise. When, at 10 p.m. on June 17, the two battalions of the 29th Brigade sallied through the main gap in the El Adem defences, at the foot of the low escarpment, the enemy was on the alert and opened fire at once. Some vehicles went up in flames, lighting up the exit, and enemy artillery and mortar concentrations crashed down upon them. A few transport vehicles got clear, but most of them ran upon part of the apron of mines on the northern approaches to the "box," where they blew up and added their flames to the general illumination.

Meanwhile the Mahrattas and Punjabis had slipped away into the darkness on foot, through specially cut

paths in the minefields. Once clear of the "box," both battalions split into small parties, and began to thread their way eastwards through twenty miles of desert alive with the enemy. The night was full of incidents and accidents. Each mile and each hour saw groups of Indians gingerly feeling their way through enemy lines, knocking sentries on the head, going to ground, or when challenged racing off in the darkness. Of the many narratives of that night the experiences of Subedar Dhera Singh, I.O.M., and his party of thirty men of the 2nd Punjabis illustrate the wily sagacity and cool courage which brought 80 per cent. of the Mahrattas and Punjabis through to safety at El Hamra.

Soon after leaving the El Adem "box" the subedar's party contacted the enemy. He organised his men in a crescent and ordered them to dash through the leaguer, firing as they went. The first enemy lines were easily passed. They then struck a larger encampment. The Punjabis went straight through it and came out on the other side with their bayonets reddened and rifle butts dented. One lance-naik was very pleased with himself. Two Germans had grabbed him. He quietened them both with the spare barrel of a Bren-gun which he was carrying.

The Germans slept in very shallow slit trenches (Subedar Dhera Singh commented on this as showing their inefficiency). He himself stepped on a German hiding in one of these trenches. A second German grabbed him by the legs and tried to pull him down. The subedar was in the midst of a group of his own men and on this account he had not drawn his pistol. But he had a heavy stick in his hand. He put his foot on the neck of one German and broke the stick over his head while a Punjabi gave the other the quietus with the bayonet. (The stick had cost Dhera Singh fifteen piastres, and after the battle he sought indemnification.) Some of the Punjabis had bombs, and as they were in

the midst of a vehicle park it seemed a pity, said the subedar, to save them. So while they lasted a bomb went under each vehicle. When the bombs were finished some of the men wished to burn the other vehicles. The subedar spoke of the foolishness of this, as the flames would reveal how few they were. They therefore fired a few rounds into the petrol tanks as they went by.

German drivers stood around with their hands raised high. "My men urged me to take the prisoners with us," said the subedar, "but I protested, saying we could scarcely take so many, being so few ourselves. I explained that guarding them would hamper our progress. The men agreed with me, but half-heartedly."

Some of the Punjabis were wounded. Most of them kept up, but one man was seriously injured. The subedar carried him for two hundred yards; then the wounded man insisted that he be left behind. "I will curse myself ever afterwards if on my account you are captured," he told Dhera Singh. He would not budge from his resolution, and was left there.

The Punjabis had been instructed to shout and make a great deal of noise in order to give the impression that they were a powerful body. This did not have the desired effect. Instead it attracted more and more enemy forces towards them. Carriers and tanks rushed up and began to chase the Punjabis. The darkness kept them from closing on Dhera Singh and his men as long as they lay quiet. But when they started to move the carriers shadowed them, and signalled to the tanks with flares. This game of hide and seek went on throughout the night. The Punjabis would move a little distance and then would keep quiet while the carriers beat about to find them. At 4 a.m. the enemy was still close, and the Punjabis began to worry, for dawn was drawing near. They threw caution to the winds and hit into the east at a sharp trot, which carried them out of the carriers' range. Just as the

light thickened in the east a challenge rang out—but in English. Subedar Dhera Singh and his men had reached safety in the lines of a British Motor Brigade.

By June 17 the retirement from the Gazala line was in full swing. The 1st South African Division had extricated itself from the Gazala corridor, and had passed through to Egypt. The 2nd South African Division manned the Tobruk defences. The 50th Northumbrian Division, finding the roads clogged, extricated itself by an astonishing advance to the westward, crossing the British minefields and crashing through the Italian covering divisions before swinging to the south for a long circuitous detour to the east. A Brigade of the 10th Indian Division had withdrawn from Gambut to Sollum, and the only British infantry formation remaining outside the Tobruk perimeter was one other Indian Brigade, which now prepared to conform to the general retirement. On the night of June 17/18, the South Wales Borderers and the Garhwalis marched out of Bel Hamid and across country for eight miles to the coastal road, where they embussed. The Garhwalis in particular went unwillingly, as their few brushes with the enemy had been successful, and they were full of fight. The columns pushed eastward through the night. At 3 a.m. on June 18, when approaching Gambut, the leading vehicles ran into a blaze of gun-fire from both sides of the road. A strong detachment of German tanks and infantry had swung down over the escarpment from the south, and had cut the road. The Garhwalis and South Wales Borderers piled out of their vehicles, and tried to force their way through the ambush, but ran into a crescent of enemies, with tanks sweeping the road for a distance of more than four hundred yards. When dawn broke the mopping up was almost over. Small groups of both regiments had filtered through, but approximately five hundred men were missing from each battalion.

The Rajputana Rifles, less some two hundred casualties, had left Sidi Rezegh already and proceeded down the road by daylight from Dbana, leaving behind Colonel West and a small covering escort for the 25-pounders. The majority got safely back but the C.O. had a particularly exciting escape. At one time he had a German clinging to his running board, while a pursuing vehicle machine-gunned him. The Germans fortunately shot off their own man and the colonel won the race in the darkness. The majority of the guns under his escort also were able to break through, only two being lost in the encounter.

The Fall of Tobruk

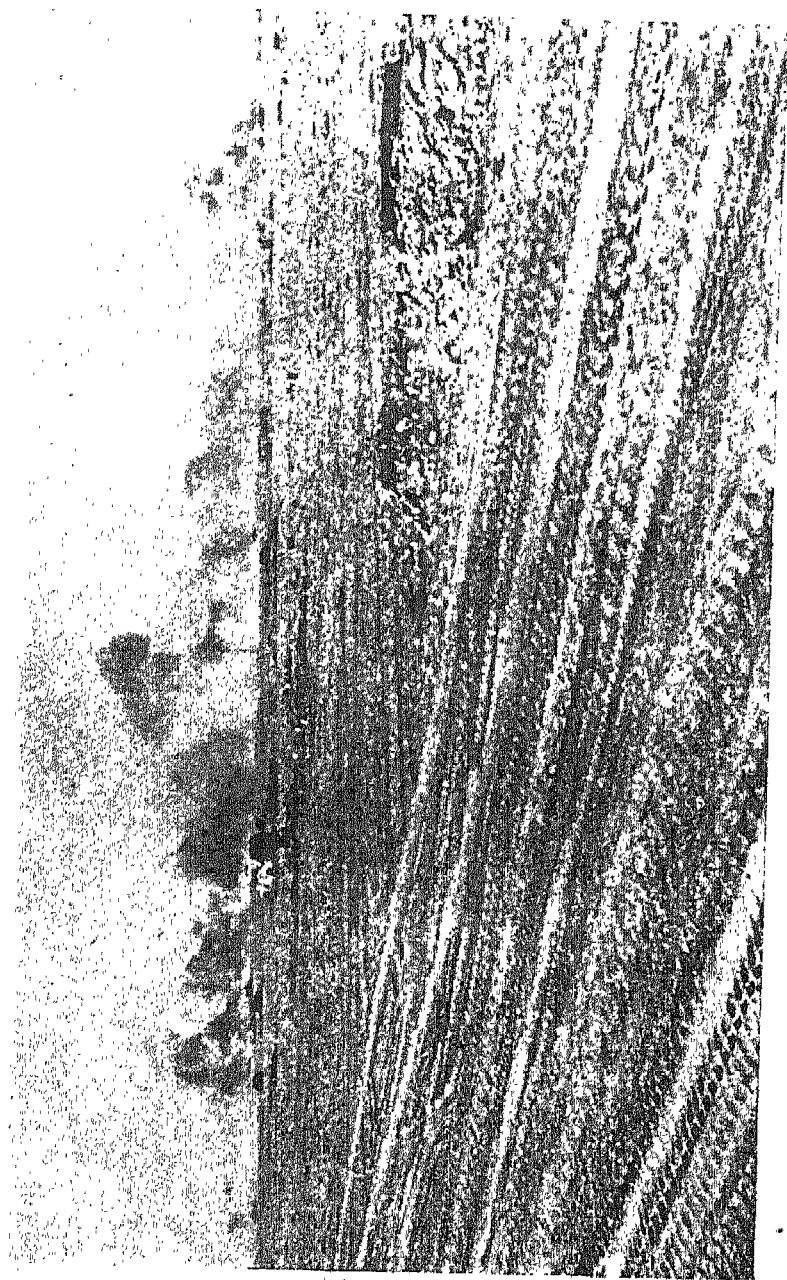
With the British infantry streaming towards the frontier, Rommel turned his forces back on the perimeter of Tobruk. Tobruk town lies on a peninsula to the north of the harbour, and the high ground along the southern foreshore completely commands the port. There are no natural obstacles on this approach from the south-east. It was from this direction that the Australians under General O'Connor first took Tobruk. It was from this side also that Rommel prepared the attack which General Auchinleck forestalled by his November offensive the year before. If the perimeter defences could be pierced on this high ground, a limited advance would place Tobruk at the mercy of the intruder. It was here therefore that Rommel mounted his assault.

The story of the storming of Tobruk cannot be told in full until the survivors have been released. This part of the narrative can only tell very sketchily the story of the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade, pieced together from the tales of survivors who made their way back to the British forces at Alamein. The bulk of the garrison was South African and the commander of the fortress was General Klopper. After much

marching and counter-marching, the 11th Brigade had withdrawn within the Tobruk perimeter on June 15, the day the panzer attack on El Adem began. Four days later the Germans cut the Bardia road and closed up on the defences. The vital sector was allotted to the 11th Indian Brigade. Brigadier Anderson arrayed his men with the Cameron Highlanders on the right, the Mahrattas in the centre and the 7th Gurkha Rifles, new arrivals in the Brigade, on the left. In support were only the 25th Field Regiment, of Sidi Breghisc fame, and the 68th Medium Regiment, which had gone through the Eritrean campaign with the 4th Division. So the artillery support also was very sparse.

Except on the front of the Gurkhas the anti-tank ditch was not a formidable obstacle. There was a belt of mines along the front but it was not nearly so thick or extensive as was desirable, for many mines had been taken up and placed elsewhere. Those that remained had been in the ground for a year and were possibly defective. The only armour available for counter-attack in case of a break-through was a small body of Valentine tanks.

At 6.30 a.m. on June 20 the assault began. Enemy artillery put down an intense bombardment of high explosive and smoke on the front held by the Mahrattas. Simultaneously squadron after squadron of Stukas dived down, hurling their bombs at the minefield. This novel form of attack broke a small gap through the mines and at once shock troops rushed forward to remove those not yet exploded, throwing out smoke candles to cover the operation. Terribly thin on the ground, under a terrific concentration of artillery and with the bombing now directed at them, the Mahrattas did their best to prevent the gap being enlarged. But in spite of their efforts some of the enemy infantry got into the defences.



A Stuka attack.

This was no real matter. Brigadier Anderson rang up Fortress Command and asked for the tank counter-attack to be put in. This was promised, and so Lieut.-Colonel Lancaster was told to hang on, which the Mahrattas duly did. By now the Germans had lined the gap with a formidable array of anti-tank guns.

Then followed a most gallant affair. The little armoured carriers of the three battalions dashed into the gap in a desperate attempt to delay the enemy, pending the arrival of the fortress tank attack. As this forlorn hope* went in, it met the German tanks coming through. Many of the carriers were destroyed before they could bring their machine-guns to bear against the men on the ground. These brave men died almost to a man.

Then the Valentine counter-attack came in. Out-numbered and outgunned they rumbled into the fray. All were destroyed.

The panzers surged onward, seventy of the heavy types. Behind them came lorried infantry in large numbers. For half an hour the Mahrattas and the Camerons, who were now becoming engaged, with the tanks all around them, held up the infantry advance. As soon as the enemy infantry got onto the position, the tanks swept onward, leaving the Indian battalion to be mopped up. The tanks thundered straight for the guns of the 25th Field Regiment, who fought with the same magnificent bravery they had shown at Sidi Brehisc. But now the odds were too great. One after another the guns were knocked out, their crews fallen round them. Fourteen out of sixteen were destroyed and then the gunners blew up the last two to prevent

*In the Peninsular War the "forlorn hope" was the name given to the band of volunteers who first climbed into the breach during an attack on a fortress. Few used to survive. The most celebrated case was that of Ensign Dyas, of the 51st Light Infantry, who three times led the "forlorn hope" at Badajoz. For many years his name was a toast throughout the army, and his health is drunk in the messes of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry to this day.

them falling into enemy hands. Many panzers were damaged or destroyed. Eight were blown up in front of one troop position, before the 25-pounders themselves were knocked out. The 25th Field Regiment and the Mahrattas had ceased to exist.

The main body of tanks were now lumbering forward onto Brigade Headquarters. Brigadier Anderson ordered all documents and vehicles to be burnt and told his men to scatter and make their way to the beach.

The attack surged onward, leaving the shattered 11th Brigade behind. What followed is not yet known and any account must be incomplete, and possibly unfair, if told before those who were there come back.

Next morning the world was stunned to learn that Tobruk had fallen, after less than eighteen hours' attack, and that twenty-five thousand British, South African and Indian troops were killed, wounded or missing.

The 11th Indian Infantry Brigade was, however, not yet finished. The Camerons and 7th Gurkhas had resisted attacks stoutly and so were by-passed. Little islands in a sea of the enemy. They refused to surrender and all next day they continued to fight. It was not until the morning of June 22, thirty-six hours after the capitulation of the fortress, that lack of water and ammunition ended this hopeless resistance.

Many of these men were not content to become prisoners in enemy hands, or having so become, were not prepared to remain. The stories of those who walked all the way back to Alamein, four hundred odd miles, would fill a book. Their adventures were astounding. Sixty-five men of the 25th Field Regiment made the journey as a formed body, but the majority walked in twos and threes and half-dozens. Drinking the rusty water from the radiators of abandoned



Tobruk. An ammunition dump explodes

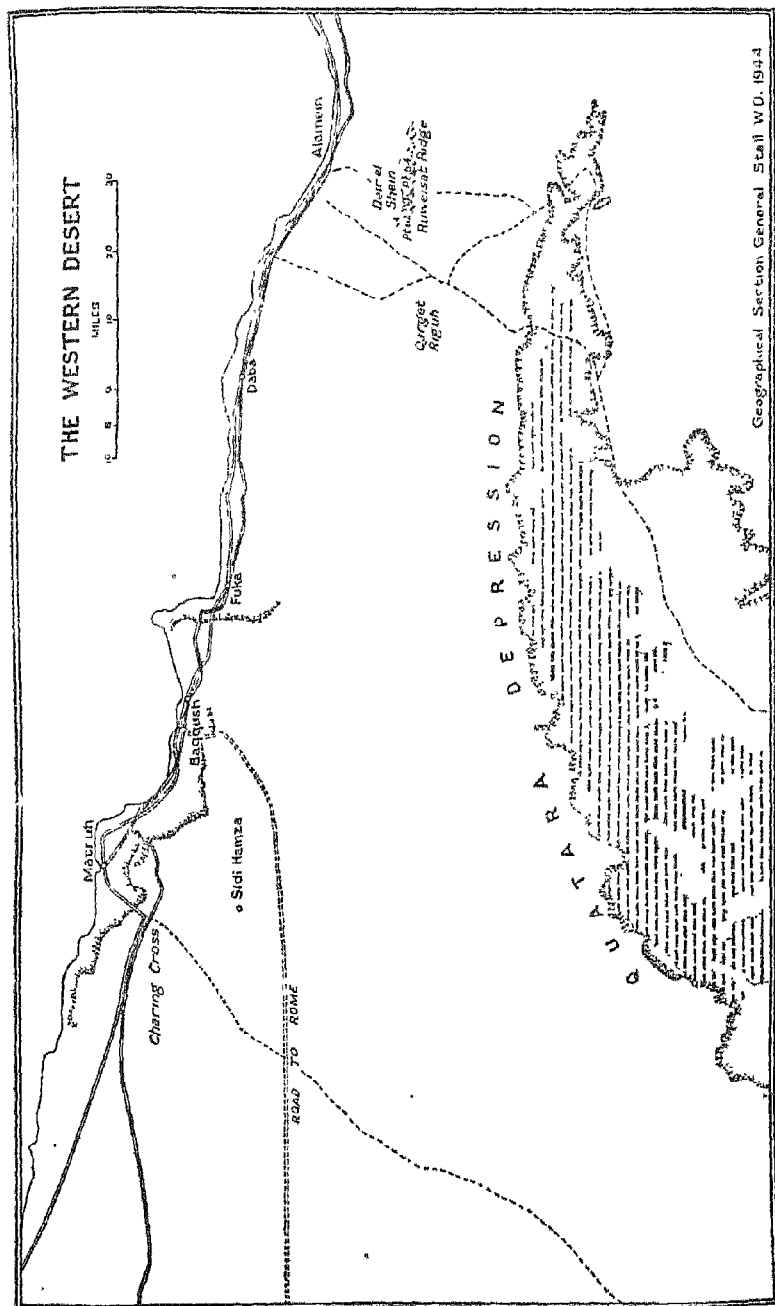
vehicles, searching for crumbs and scraps on the floor boards, they arrived emaciated wrecks. Their tales were fantastic. There was the Jock, who, lying on the ground faint with hunger, suddenly found a desert hare sitting within three feet of him. With all the cunning of desperation he managed to catch it, and nothing remained of that hare in a very few minutes. There was the party which captured an Italian tank, complete with crew and a valuable reserve of water and food, when their only weapon was a broom handle. There was the Gurkha who escaped from Tobruk, was recaptured near Matruh, escaped again and finally got through the enemy lines to safety. There was the party which captured a lorry and drove on until Italians signalled them to halt. With their hearts in their boots the party stopped, but the Italians were removing mines from the track and after they had cleared the way allowed the escapers to drive past with friendly and thankful grins. There were the seven Mahrattas, who took six weeks over the journey and realised they had reached safety only by the forceful language coming from a slit trench in front. For two months these men continued to arrive at Alamein, though many must have died or been recaptured on the way. But only a very small percentage of the garrison made its escape.

FIFTEEN

Retreat to El Alamein

PROFOUND repercussions accompanied the fall of Tobruk. Even the Prime Minister, who never glosses defeats, was unable to conceal his bewilderment from the House of Commons. Reaction in Cairo was no less marked. A good battle had gone "bad," and a fresh appreciation was necessary. The conclusion immediately reached was that the frontier line was indefensible. Before the prisoners in Tobruk had been counted, the Afrika Korps, consisting of two panzer and two lorry-borne divisions, was swinging to the south-east, heading for Conference Cairn. Little more than a masking force moved against the Sollum-Capuzzo triangle, where the 10th Indian Division manned the defensive positions and awaited the approach of the enemy. Under its command was the 2nd Fighting French Brigade and the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 4th Division, which had just arrived from Palestine. A screen was thrown out to contact the enemy, and while Eighth Army transport streamed eastwards and down over Sollum Pass, the Division made all preparations for a pitched battle on the crest of the frontier escarpment.

A battalion of the 10th Baluch Regiment was ordered to take over one of the sectors from the French



Foreign Legion. These famous fighters, however, had no intention of leaving the front line just when a battle was about to start. They stated that they knew nothing of any orders to hand over. As the Indians had received the orders, there was a complete impasse, but an arrangement satisfactory to both sides was reached. The Baluchis and the Foreign Legion both held the position until at last the Frenchmen were convinced and moved off to other fields.

On June 22, however, it became noised about that a continuation of the retreat was to be anticipated. The Indian soldiers frankly could not understand it. This business of relinquishing hardly won terrain without battle was beyond them. A subedar-major, whose many years' service gave privilege, protested to his commanding officer. "What will they think at home, sahib? They will say that we have been beaten. But we are not beaten. We are ready to fight, we are eager to fight. Shall I be able to write home and tell them the truth?"

Towards Conference Cairn the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade and British armoured forces were already under pressure, and one Brigade of the 10th Division was on the road to the Delta, to re-fit and re-form. On June 22, the remaining three brigades of the 10th Division prepared to evacuate in three columns, each Brigade leaving behind one battalion as a rearguard. The 6th Rajputana Rifles, the 13th Frontier Force Rifles and the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry were chosen to cover the retirement. That night the remainder of the 10th Division moved down over the escarpment on the 125-mile journey to Mersa Matruh. Behind them the three battalions spread out to cover the Divisional perimeter, and with armour and guns in support, to demonstrate against the approaching enemy.

The Mahrattas sent patrols well to the west of the Sollum position, where they contacted the enemy



Captain C. R. Riddick, M.C., 6th Rajputana Rifles.

advancing along the main coastal road. The German forces were feeling their way in, and the Mahratta armoured carriers were able to do a certain amount of useful damage. At noon on June 23 tanks appeared on the flat ground to the west of Capuzzo. At 9.15 p.m. that evening, the Mahrattas withdrew over Sollum Pass, being the last troops to traverse the famous switchback which leads down on to the coastal plain. As they reached the bottom, the pass erupted in a terrific burst of smoke and flame. The engineers had done their work well.

Further to the south, the 6th Rajputana Rifles withdrew on the same night. They planned to descend the escarpment along the line of the railway near Halfway House. Moving off soon after nightfall, the Raj Rif threaded a narrow gap in the frontier minefield, only to find enemy leaguer flares soaring to the eastwards. From the north came sounds of firing, which suggested that the enemy had broken through somewhere below Sollum. The Raj Rif decided to wait for dawn, sending out patrols in the meantime. One patrol overran an enemy observation post, and brought back nine prisoners. It was obvious that the road to the east was blocked. But this battalion had been in the desert for a long time and was completely desert-wise, so without hesitation it turned to the south and headed for Conference Cairn. Here the British armour was streaming through, and the Rajputana Rifles, following in their train, set course for Mersa Matruh, arriving with small losses after several exciting brushes with enemy panzers and armoured cars.

The 13th Frontier Force Rifles (Lieut.-Colonel C. E. Morris) was the southernmost column in the retirement. During the night of June 23 the Piffers moved southwards along the line of the escarpment with German flares rising steadily on their right flank. Striking a gap in the minefields, they waited until

dawn before moving east. They found themselves shadowed by enemy tanks and armoured cars, and the withdrawal on one or two occasions became a chase. Colonel Morris and his men, however, were adverse to giving anything up, and although two carriers and one porter were hit, they retrieved all three vehicles and brought them in. During one of the brushes Rifleman Udhan Singh, a tough Dogra, was lost. Ten days later, having traversed over one hundred miles on foot, he rejoined his battalion, still carrying his wireless set. He had walked through Rommel's forces and was quite indignant when it was suggested that he might have abandoned his wireless set. "It is against orders," he said, "to leave Government equipment behind. This set cost six hundred chips. Where would I be if they took it out of my pay?"

Mersa Matruh

On June 24, the 10th Division was able to report in at Mersa Matruh at more or less full strength, having moved one hundred and twenty-five miles across a waterless plain in forty-eight hours, shadowed, harassed and ground-strafed constantly by an enemy who had now exceeded his previous bounds of advance, and who felt himself to be on the road to victory. In retirements in which units are hopelessly mixed up and scattered over wide distances, it is the supply columns which carry the greatest strain. A dozen times in each day "Q" services find themselves with almost insuperable problems. Units come out of nowhere, to be placed under command, to be fed and watered. There is never enough transport to supply all; the shuttling of vehicles takes on the intricacy of a jig-saw puzzle. Supply dumps are constantly shifting. Officers go on reconnaissance in search of them, and never come back. Units struck off ration strength as captured, walk in next day demanding supplies. Above everything else looms the liquid problem. There are

never enough water tins to go round, and never petrol tins which do not leak. (After this war some sardonic essayist will find a fruitful subject in the British Army's determination to capture enough "Jerryicans" to serve, rather than to manufacture efficient water and petrol tins of its own.) Then when supply columns have been sent up to units who have given a reliable map reference, too often such convoys run into the enemy before they can reach their destination; or having reached the map reference, they find no one there; or having found someone, they arrive in the middle of a battle, or of a hasty withdrawal. All this adds up to a hundred nightmares for the hard-working "Q" services, and that they continue to function efficiently is a supreme tribute to their patience and endurance.

On June 25 armoured car patrols reported sixty-five enemy tanks accompanied by two thousand motor transport, to be approaching Mersa Matruh. Early next morning the 90th Light Division and the 21st Armoured Division were identified in the coastal area, with Headquarters of the Afrika Korps and the 15th Armoured Division following fifteen miles behind them. That morning one Indian Brigade occupied the western sea-coast sector of Matruh perimeter, with another on its left, holding the airfield and the escarpment as far as Charing Cross. The 5th Indian Brigade then took up the line, and facing to the south and south-west, covered the arid desert approaches from the direction of Qaryet Riguh. Beyond them the 5th Indian Division, which now consisted of the 9th and 29th Brigades, both very weak, held Sidi Hamza, twenty miles to the south of Mersa Matruh. Here the crescent of British minefields ended. The 5th Division were busily engaged in extending the minefields. The 29th Brigade was operating in two columns ("GLEECOL" and "LEATHERCOL"), each of which consisted of a half battalion of infantry, eight

25-pounders and a few anti-tank guns. The role of these columns was fluid, but their chief task was to prevent the enemy from breaking into the rear of the 50th Northumbrian Division, which was deployed in the desert facing south ; while beyond the Tynesiders the New Zealanders completed the cordon of defences around Mersa Matruh.

On June 26 the enemy was bearing down on Charing Cross, seven miles south of Mersa Matruh on top of the escarpment, with one hundred tanks and three thousand motor transport. The Sabratta and Trentino Italian Divisions were identified as closing up behind the German spearhead. Far to the south another armoured force was by-passing Matruh, heading for the escarpment east of the anti-tank ditch which completed the defences of the port. A last train left on June 25 with heavy equipment, and it was realised that within a matter of hours the garrison would be isolated.

On the afternoon of June 25, the last of the British armoured forces dropped back through Mersa Matruh minefield and the gaps were mined. The morning of June 26 passed quietly, although unknown to the defenders the High Command had decided the previous evening to substitute mobile action for a fixed defence. One company per battalion had withdrawn to the Delta in anticipation of reorganisation into battle groups.

At 3.30 p.m. two tank columns approached the Mersa Matruh minefield and began to scout along it for gaps. Discovering the gaps covered by the 29th Brigade columns, enemy guns came into action north of Sidi Hamza. After a bombardment lasting less than half an hour, a heavy force of tanks massed on the verge of the minefield and charged straight across, with engineers riding outside, and fitters following with spare tracks to fit on damaged tanks. Communications



A Regimental Barber with the tools of his trade.

with the 29th Brigade broke down, and after a last message from GLEECOL that one hundred tanks had broken through, both columns went off the air. LEATHERCOL was completely overrun, only a few men and guns getting away. GLEECOL fared little better. At 7.45 p.m., patrols placed a heavy body of enemy armour approximately ten miles east of the Matruh minefield; but in the middle of the night the 29th Infantry Brigade rather astonishingly came on the air again, to report that they had collected a few scattered formations, and were in action with enemy armour nearly twenty miles east of the minefield, and within ten miles of the coast.

All that night, 5th Indian Division Headquarters worked indomitably, rolling up odd assortments of men and guns into coherent formations, and thence into battle groups. By 5.30 a.m. on the morning of June 27, the 5th Indian Division was organised into three mobile columns, each consisting of a few 25-pounders, one or more companies of infantry, and whatever light guns could be found. The Division unfortunately had not been able to retrieve its garrison in Sidi Hamza, consisting of two companies of Mahrattas with some supporting guns. This small party held on until the night of June 27, when it tried to break out on foot. Few escaped.

In the meantime enemy infantry had arrived all along the western perimeter of the Matruh defences. Italian troops made a great show of marching and counter-marching as if concentrating for attack. When the artillery began to shell Mersa Matruh on the afternoon of the 27th, an Italian force demonstrated against the coastal positions. The attack was not pressed home. It was evident that the real threat lay in the south, where the 5th Infantry Brigade moved outside the perimeter onto the escarpment. Here enemy leaguers were thickening. A number of raiding

parties, including guns of a field regiment and a company of the Essex Regiment of the 5th Brigade, sallied into the desert and shot up the soft-skinned transport which was streaming past to the east. On the same night, a company of the 6th Rajputana Rifles ambushed the German guard on the more northerly of the two principal gaps. This famous desert Brigade still maintained that attack was the best defence.

Meanwhile the C.R.E., 10th Division (Colonel Siegert), with the assistance of Major Archibald, a South African engineer, worked strenuously in preparing all vital installations in Matruh for demolition. The situation east of Matruh minefield was confused, but on the western perimeter both Indian Brigades, while under pressure, had no difficulty in holding the line. Attempts at infiltration were met by quick raids by Sikhs, Gurkhas and Piffers, which yielded prisoners.

On the morning of June 27, however, the luck changed, and a patrol from the 10th Baluch Regiment of the 5th Brigade was ambushed by lorried infantry—only one truck escaped. That afternoon, twenty tanks approached on the front of the Mahrattas and began to work their way in onto the position held by a battalion of the 11th Sikh Regiment. Two sections of Sikhs were overrun before the infiltration was stopped. On the same afternoon five tanks, with Tommy-gunners riding outside, dashed straight into the lines of the 13th Frontier Force Rifles and overran a company. Among the prisoners was Lieut.-Colonel Morris and two of his officers, who were hurried off to Rommel's Headquarters, a few miles behind the minefield. There the prisoners were introduced to General Rommel, who had received his Marshal's baton that day.

Rommel strolled through the group of prisoners with a camera, taking pictures of various Indian

types, while his silver-daggers Storm Troopers came dashing up to him with messages. A terse answer, a click of heels, and away they dashed again. Colonel Morris sought and obtained permission from the Marshal to say good-bye to his men and tell them how to behave in captivity. Standing in front of his men with the Germans listening respectfully behind, he addressed his men in Urdu. First he told them that the Germans had given him permission to say good-bye and then proceeded to give explicit instructions as to how to escape. The Indians threw themselves into the part, looking despondent and unhappy, while listening to the careful orders. "Wait till dark. Scatter and head to the east. Knock anybody on the head who gets in your way." As the prisoners were being marched off under an Italian escort, a British armoured car came out of nowhere with machine-guns blazing. The Italian guards went to ground and the prisoners scattered in all directions. Towards dawn, Colonel Morris and a fair number of his men were picked up by a New Zealand patrol. General Auchinlock was in the neighbourhood and at once sent for him. Colonel Morris is probably the only officer who has been interviewed by both Commanders-in-Chief in the course of the same action.

On June 28, the 10th Division was warned that Mersa Matruh could not be held, that the roads to the rear were cut, and that the garrison must break out as best it could. The hard-fighting 5th Division columns were already dropping back on Daba, in order to avoid the enemy armour which was streaming up from the south-west to cut them off. The 5th Brigade had tried to open a bridgehead across the two escarpments to the south of Mersa Matruh, through which all the beleaguered forces might pass into the open desert. The attempt had failed, and when the time for evacuation came each of the Brigades had to find its way out as best it could. On the afternoon of June 28

heavy bombing attacks fired the oil installations and jetties along the Matruh water fronts. As night fell the military and naval demolitions began. A thick pall of smoke cloaked the town. Beneath this cover the 10th Division made its preparations to crash through the enemy cordon.

Break-out From Matruh

One Indian Brigade fanned out over the entire perimeter to act as rearguard. At 9 p.m. the general movement began, with all columns heading south in cruising formation. Unfortunately the moon was nearly full, and no dispersal could hide the long lines of vehicles. As units cleared the defences a ring of enemy leaguer flares soared and fell ceaselessly to the south, the south-east and to the east. Only to the west and south-west was the horizon silent and dark. All columns therefore tended to bear in this direction, and the night's perilous adventure began with the 10th Division heading away from safety.

The narrative of that night comprises a thousand stories of wild rides under the moon, all of which begin in more or less the same pattern, and nearly all of which finish with fantastic adventure. Four German Divisions lay directly in the path of the 10th Division. The enemy was on the alert. After the first few miles the formation began to break up, and in small groups the vehicles began to feel their way into the east. Much of the terrain was abominable. Soft sand alternated with crazy pavement ridges, where the vehicles lurched over huge flat stones, to drop into wadis, beyond, or to emerge on the top of a ridge and to look into a German encampment a few yards away. Throughout the night, the crash of bombs, the soar of flares, the rattle of small arms fire and the flames of burning vehicles marked every mile of the passage through the German lines.

Certain circumstances favoured the enterprise of escape. The Germans were exhausted by forced marches, and they were widely scattered over the desert. Moreover, many enemy units leaguered in close formation, and British vehicles bumped through or passed them without recognition from the sentries. Towards morning the sky clouded over and a ground mist gave additional cover which allowed many to escape. Throughout June 29, the 10th Division, consisting of hundreds of vehicles scattered higgledy-piggledy over a hundred miles of desert, doggedly felt its way eastwards, slipping away from the dust puffs on the horizon and hoping against hope that petrol and back axles would last out. Many vehicles bogged down or their tanks ran dry; shells and bombs finished many others. Some groups managed to keep a fair degree of cohesion, and fought off individual assailants.

Twenty-four hours after the columns left Mersa Matruh sixty per cent. of the personnel of the three Brigades and Divisional Headquarters had reached safety. Other parties came in after being behind the enemy lines for as much as four days. One group of vehicles steered due south until they struck the Qattara Depression. Others joined the New Zealanders, who were holding back the enemy in the depths of the desert, and only reported back to 10th Division after the battle was over. The Divisional Commander's station wagon was blown up on a mine, but he himself escaped unscathed. A jeep came in with the proud bag of three anti-aircraft guns which persisted in firing tracer at the escaping transport. The driver of the jeep, a young officer with a Tommy-gun, stalked each of them from behind, and wiped out their crews single-handed. Another vehicle drove slowly down between two parked lines of German tanks; the officer said "Good-night" cheerily in German to the unsuspecting sentry. Yet another vehicle, confronted by a more alert sentry, drove over him. By a hundred

such individual exploits the 10th Division, badly mauled but still full of fight, broke clear of Mersa Matruh.

The 5th Brigade arrived almost intact, although much battered, at El Alamein. During June 27 and 28 the Essex and Baluchis had been heavily engaged on top of the escarpment, over ground which had been very familiar in 1940, but few who remembered those days were left. In these actions the 5th Brigade had drawn the enemy onto itself, for the break-out had come, so matters were far from easy.

As zero hour drew near the Brigade Headquarters column was swelled by a large number of oddments, who had lost their parent units. The column started three hundred and fifty vehicles strong. The other columns were left the choice of moving as formed bodies or splitting up into little parties moving on their own. The break-out started at 9.40 p.m., and away went the 5th Brigade on a venture every bit as exciting as that of its sister Brigade at Benghazi five months before.

The Baluchis in particular had a nasty job. The way out was over the ridge they had captured the night before, only to be blown off it again. In fact the battalion had to charge straight through a position known to be strongly held by the enemy. The charge started. All along the immediate front flare after flare rose into the sky, which with the light of the moon made the desert as bright as day. The ridge was reached in safety, but then hell was let loose. Many enemy batteries were trained on the battalion and salvo after salvo at short range ploughed through the charging trucks. Machine-gun bullets tore through the battalion and soon the area was blotted out in dust and smoke, lit by the red glare of burning lorries. But through the inferno the battalion rushed, at a speed of about thirty miles an hour, swerving to avoid derelicts and

slit trenches, bumping, jumping, swaying, with the fast revving engines roaring through the night.

Then the leading trucks struck a newly laid minefield. The Baluchis slowed down and swerved away, which was just the target the enemy anti-tank guns were awaiting. From every quarter, in front, both sides and even behind, they opened up. But although they appeared to be in the very jaws of hell, nothing could stop this battalion. With trucks and lorries burning furiously all around, the Baluchis charged on.

The battalion carriers, in the meantime, had swerved the other way to deal with a line of anti-tank guns. Every single one of the carriers was destroyed in this very gallant effort, but not before Naik Mian Gul had rushed the nearest gun, killing all the crew, then switched to another and dealt with it in the same way before his carrier went up in flames. Only three men of the whole platoon survived, one of whom was Mian Gul. He boarded a truck at speed and lived to fight another day.

The battalion was now through the outer defences and came up against entrenched infantry. The sight of two hundred trucks and lorries roaring down on them was too much for these infantry soldiers. They clambered from their trenches and fled from the path of the onrushing vehicles. From every truck and every lorry there poured a hail of death as the Indian soldiers seized their chance to have a hit back at the enemy.

The battalion had passed right through the enemy, but their troubles were far from over. The German panzers had been let loose to deal with this impudent foe who drove through their position in lorries. The Baluchis were very split up, but joined together in small parties and set off eastward, dodging the tanks. Their adventures from then onwards were like those of the rest of the 10th Division, and back they arrived at El

Alamein. Thence to the Delta went the 5th Brigade with the remainder of the Division, but, after seven days for re-equipping, forward went this great Brigade again to rejoin the Essex, who had remained to fight it out on the Ruweisat Ridge.

The End of the Retreat

The tide of battle flowed on into the east. Baqqush was abandoned and Daba, that neat township with its famous N.A.A.F.I. restaurant—"NOAH'S ARK"—fell next day. Hour by hour the sorely tried 29th Indian Brigade faced the surge of the enemy, held him briefly, and slipped away before he could stream past and cut them off. Out of the strong Brigade group, which had held El Adem "box," Brigadier Reid could now muster only six companies of infantry. Twenty-three field guns remained out of three field regiments, together with a few anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. This small force represented all of the 5th Indian Division which remained in action. Yet even this handful had to be divided into three battle groups (SCOTCOL, GLEECOL, and RESERVEFORCE) in order to cover the utmost front.

Late in the evening of June 27 Brigadier Reid was ordered to concentrate his small force at Fuka Pass, to seize and to hold the escarpment there. Corps promised immediate reinforcements. At noon on the 28th, enemy scouting forces appeared from the south, and at 6.30 p.m. large bodies of enemy transport began to stream past the southern flank of SCOTCOL who held the desert side of the position. SCOTCOL threw in an attack which the enemy ignored, and pushing on by-passed the position. The Germans then swung abruptly north and overran RESERVEFORCE, destroying it completely. Together with Brigadier Reid, companies of the Highland Light Infantry, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry and 2nd Punjab Regiment disappeared. Elements of SCOTCOL and GLEECOL



"General Auchinleck was in personal command"

managed to extricate themselves and fell back on Alamein.

Throughout June 30 dribblets of the 10th Division continued to arrive at Alamein. They came in upon a scene of intense activity. General Auchinleck was in personal command. Thousands saw him as he drove in his open car from position to position. His strong, serene personality meant much to men strained to breaking point. He stopped and talked whenever possible to the little groups, which represented his last line of defence. Everywhere his words brought fresh heart. "The enemy has stretched beyond his limit. He thinks we are a broken army. His tactics against the New Zealanders yesterday were poor in the extreme. He hopes to take Egypt by bluff. We are going to show him where he gets off." In the retaining wall across the Qattara bottleneck he had already established two bastions—the South Africans on the sea coast, and the New Zealanders near the edge of the depression. For the fifteen-mile gap between these forces he had to find stoppers.

Fortunately the nature of the ground simplified this task. A few miles west of Alamein, and ten miles from the sea, a narrow tongue of land begins to rise out of the desert. For several miles it is only perceptibly higher than the surrounding waste, but gradually it emerges as a peninsula of high ground, until at the rear of the Alamein position, fifty-five miles from Alexandria, it ends abruptly in a bluff which can be seen for many miles around. This is the Ruweisat Ridge, whose crest commanded the gaps between the New Zealanders on one side, and the South Africans on the other. It was therefore obvious that the enemy would endeavour to thrust straight down this ridge from its western tip. General Auchinleck's first concern was the defence of this vital high ground.

As the 10th Division mustered at Alamein, time became the critical factor. In a few hours the enemy

would come crashing in for a test of strength. An immediate battle organisation was necessary. Brigade and Divisional Headquarters passed through to the Delta, but every available gun and all formations sufficiently cohesive to fight were assembled under Brigadier R. P. Waller, C.R.A. 10th Division. His forces were sparse enough, consisting of part of the Essex Regiment of the 5th Brigade, a field regiment, and a light A.A. regiment, together with every other oddment of infantry and guns which he could scrape together. Twenty-four hours sufficed to prepare ROBCOL for battle, and on the morning of July 1 this force hurried towards the western tip of the Ruweisat Ridge.

Disaster in the Deir-el-Shein

Before it could arrive, disaster had supervened. At the call for reinforcements the 18th Indian Brigade had come posting at full speed from Iraq. It consisted of battalions of the Essex Regiment, 11th Sikh Regiment and 3rd Gurkha Rifles. The Brigade detrained at Alamein on the morning of June 28, after a harrowing night's journey in which the train was bombed, causing a considerable number of casualties. Such transport as was available immediately began to move the Brigade to the Deir-el-Shein, a series of conical ridges rising above a central depression, about four miles to the north-west of the western tip of the Ruweisat Ridge. Here the remainder of the 97th and the 121st Field Regiments, which had fought all the way back from Tobruk, arrived to give gun support. As the infantry debussed in this heat-stricken, desolate dust-bowl they began to build defences. For the next two days they worked feverishly, for twenty hours out of the twenty-four, digging, wiring and mining. Only dry rations had been brought up, and the water allowance was three-quarters of a gallon per day. A strong defensive "box" might have been built had

the enemy held off. But the ground was very stony, and compressors arrived too late to dig emplacements. The full quota of mines also arrived too late to be laid.

On June 30 there was thunder on the right, and across the valley the 18th Indian Brigade saw the first attack go in on the South Africans in the Alamein "box." Early next morning the Guides Cavalry, which had been acting as a screen, came through the Deir el Shein and reported considerable forces of tanks and lorried infantry to be near. The Brigade took up battle positions in a semi-circular sector of six thousand yards frontage, with the Sikhs on the west and south, the Essex on the west and north, and the 3rd Gurkhas covering the rear of the position.

At 9 a.m. the enemy started ranging on the Deir el Shein from the south-west with black air bursts. Shortly after, a captured British officer was sent into the "box" to demand surrender. Following refusal, a demonstration in force occurred which was easily beaten back. At 10 a.m. a heavy shoot swept down over the Essex, and at 12.30 p.m. fifteen tanks with engineers riding outside approached the thin minefield and began to open a gap between the Gurkhas and the Home County men. The first infantry attempts to penetrate into the cage were repulsed, but from noon onwards a heavy dust-storm blew up. Thereafter visibility was very bad, and the defenders were often unable to see for more than a few yards. The enemy naturally took full advantage of this cover, and during the afternoon, the minefield was penetrated. Enemy tanks smashed through and overran the Essex position.

At 5 p.m. the tanks swept around onto the Sikhs where a troop of 2-pounders destroyed two panzers before they closed. Four 25-pounders were still in action and they too took their toll. The tanks were too close, however, and the guns were immediately knocked out. The German tank crews found the mess tent and

stopped to drink up the beer. Colonel Bamfield and many of his men slipped away. In the confusion and dust many others went cannily to ground, and bided their time. Captain V. F. Siqueira, the battalion Medical Officer, was stopped by a sentry as he sauntered out. Captain Siqueira, of Goanese extraction, replied to the challenge in fluent Portuguese. The similarity to Italian raised doubts. The sentry closed to investigate. Captain Siqueira knocked him down with a well-timed punch, bumped his head on a boulder for good measure, and dashed off to safety. Yet in spite of all escapes, seven officers and five hundred men of the Sikhs were missing.

As darkness fell the panzers and lorried infantry swung around onto the Gurkhas. Individual vehicles had been slipping from the cage, and many succeeded in running the gauntlet. At 10 p.m. a heavy air bombardment in the neighbourhood gave the remaining Gurkhas their chance, and everyone withdrew from the "box" on a bearing due east. Unfortunately two companies ran into a tank park, where they came under heavy fire and sustained casualties. The units then split and the men made their way out individually. A fair number managed to reach the South Africans across the valley, where they were treated as honoured guests. In all the Gurkhas lost six officers and two hundred and fifty-five men.

The Ruweisat Ridge

This disaster to the 18th Brigade, however, had given ROBCOL valuable hours in which to coalesce, to throw out lines of communication, and to move westwards along the Ruweisat Ridge towards the pimples of high ground which became famous afterwards as Points 62 and 64. Moreover, on the morning of July 2, Colonel Noble arrived with the balance of his Essex battalion from the 5th Brigade. Other small parties of indomitable men, who no sooner reached

safety than they reorganised for battle, were assembling among the coastal dunes and were preparing to push back into the fight at once. When the enemy tank force began to mount the Ruweisat Ridge on the morning of July 2, they found Brigadier Waller's small command dug in with excellent observation and well sited guns.

At 10 a.m. the attack began. For the next six hours the enemy armour milled feverishly around this barrier in its path. As often as the panzers emerged out of their dust clouds and attempted to thrust down the ridge, they sustained punishment. At the end of the day seven guns had been knocked out, and the small column had suffered serious casualties. But the great fact remained that Rommel's armour, for the first time since Tobruk, had withdrawn to the west. It was an omen. On the morning of July 3, ROBCOL followed the enemy westward, and at 9 a.m. clashed in a heavy artillery exchange over the ridges three miles west of Point 97. The enemy defended desperately and again ROBCOL suffered, six guns being lost. But the panzer rush had been halted. A stopper had been driven into the neck of the funnel.

Thereafter the defences thickened hourly. ROBCOL absorbed the reinforcements and became WALLGROUP. There was now sufficient strength assembled in artillery to make the Ruweisat Ridge very unhealthy for panzers. Rommel therefore swung to the north and tested the South Africans. He failed to shake their grip on the coastal ridges. He plunged into the south and found the New Zealanders waiting with the first of those weapons which were destined to make an end of him—the 6-pounders. From the sea to the high black escarpment in the far south which stands above the Qattara sands, he launched sudden furious thrusts against the stiffening line. It held everywhere.

Behind Alamein belts of wire sprang up all over the open desert. Giant shovels widened the salt pans outside Alexandria into anti-tank ditches. Along the fresh water canals and in the lush fields where the *fellaheen* had begun to harvest his corn, a million mines went into the ground. Crow's-feet and mine holes appeared on the Cairo boulevard, and in the long avenue towards the Pyramids. Mussolini put on his white uniform and waited. The medals had been struck. The band instruments and the Egyptologists for the triumphant entry had arrived at Mersa Matruh. But all these preparations were unnecessary, for the Alamein line, fluid one day, elastic the next, became in one short week an iron wall against which the invader battered in vain.

SIXTEEN

The Forging of the Victory

ROMMEL had been brought to a halt, but indefatigably he sought to set his forces in motion again. Encountering a hard core of resistance on Ruweisat Ridge, his much tried 90th Light Division swung southwards, by-passed the New Zealanders, and curved a pincer of armour and lorried infantry across their rear. Next day the New Zealanders bit off this pincer. Shifting his stance, Rommel struck at the centre between the New Zealanders and the remnants of the Indian Divisions. Here again he was treated roughly. He then swung his attack on to the South Africans on the coast. But by night and day steady columns of brown-torsoed, bare-headed arrogant young men were flowing through Cairo onto the desert trails, filling the air with their ribaldry. The best Division that has ever left Australia was on its way up to relieve the South Africans in the Alamein "box," and to allow General Pienaar's Springboks to filter into the ten-mile gap which separated them from the Ruweisat Ridge. In the far south fresh British, Free French, Greek and Polish units had come into the line. By July 4 the battlefront was cohesive and elastic. Thereafter no manœuvre would suffice to win the Nile.

WALLGROUP was not for long the sole custodian of the vital Ruweisat Ridge. General Briggs arrived

with Headquarters of the 5th Indian Division. The valiant 5th Brigade, after reforming outside Alexandria, arrived back at Alamein on July 5. The 9th Brigade was rapidly rounding into shape and the 161st Indian Brigade now came into the desert. General Briggs therefore had a full Division once again and early in July assumed command of the Ruweisat sector.

General Auchinleck did not wait for overwhelming strength. There had been no greater traitor than time in this desert battle. Prisoners divulged that some at least of the German combatant formations were in an extreme state of exhaustion. Orders went out that the enemy was to be given no breathing space. He no longer had the strength to mount a full-scale attack in the north, in the centre and in the south simultaneously, so "rebound" tactics were instituted against him. If he pushed on one part of the front, the elastic line sprang smartly against him somewhere else. It was in conformity with this plan that on the night of July 14/15, the 5th Brigade attacked westwards towards Point 64, at the end of the Ruweisat Ridge, overlooking the Deir el Shein position to the north-west. For some days the enemy had been probing the New Zealanders further south. As he probed, the Indians undertook to probe back. Ruweisat was a forefinger poked into his midriff. Any jab would be felt.

There was another reason for an advance on this sector. The squat long barrelled 6-pounders had arrived. The first New Zealand infantrymen to man them were delighted with their performances. The 6-pounder, with its rapid fire, high velocity and solid shot, offered a target not more than one-tenth the size of a tank. At any reasonable range there could be only one end to a duel between guns of equal deadliness if one stood on a shifting platform and the other was solidly dug in. To prove the case it was necessary to bring the tanks well within range. The low hog's back

of Ruweisat Ridge was ideal for such a test. To seize a long finger of ground with the enemy on both sides invited a counter-attack. When the panzers advanced to amputate, the 6-pounders would have their chance.

Advance Along the Ridge

Shortly after midnight on July 15, the 5th Brigade silently threaded through the belt of wire covering the British minefield, and moved forward toward the ridge from the south-east. On the right went the Baluchis, on the left the Rajputana Rifles. Shortly after dawn the Baluchis were on the ridge with a good bag of prisoners, but the Raj Rif had run into heavy fire, barbed wire and minefields in the darkness, had got separated and were pinned down. Reorganising in the open, with Captain Mian Khan doing wonders, the battalion advanced again at 11 a.m., penetrated the minefield and captured Point 64. Two battalions of the Brescia Division were overrun and nearly a thousand prisoners taken. The New Zealanders came up on the left and the ground was consolidated. The forefinger had sunk as far as the first knuckle into the midriff.

With strict logic Rommel prepared to deal with such impudence. That evening he threw a heavy armoured attack at the New Zealanders and forced them back, thus isolating the 5th Brigade in its advanced position. The garrison of Point 64 consisted of the Rajputana Rifles, two companies of the Essex and a battery of an anti-tank regiment, while the Baluchis and remainder of the Essex were further east.

On the morning of the 16th an enemy intercept confirmed what had been suspected—that during the night enemy tanks had moved into the cover of the Deir el Shein depression, to the north-west of the Indian position. A British Armoured Brigade with a strong force of 6-pounders came up that afternoon and

formed a screen just under the lee of Point 64. Stuka attacks and artillery fire increased in intensity throughout the afternoon, offering evidence that Rommel was acting characteristically. The sun began to sink in the west, blinding the eyes of the defenders; whereupon the British armour warmed up and crept slowly forward to a hull down position. The 6-pounders likewise moved up, and laid their flat snouts flush over the crest overlooking Deir el Shein. At 6.30 p.m. a cloud of dust broke to the north-west of Point 64, and with a thunder of guns the panzer rush came.

Twelve hundred yards from the Indian Brigade's position the tanks emerged over a low ridge. A hail of solid shot crashed into them. The infantry crouched in their sangars and slit trenches, while a furious battle raged overhead. As dark fell streams of interlacing tracers crossed as the secondary armament of the rival tanks engaged. The flat trajectory of the Breda tracer was easily distinguished from the looping British fire. Light armour and armoured cars skirmished out to meet each other, and short deadly exchanges occurred. Towards midnight silence fell. Rommel's attack had got nowhere. The day of the bull's rush was over.

Morning confirmed this view. Within two thousand yards of the 5th Brigade's position derelicts strewed the battleground. They were not all as dead as they seemed, however, and Brigadier Russell of the 5th Brigade was a fighting man of suspicious mind. The last derelict count as night fell was somewhat less than the numbers on his front at dawn. "They must have been breeding," said the Brigadier as he reached for his artillery phone. The field guns opened, and several panzers which had been shamming death, waiting for a careless target, suddenly came to life and scurried away. When Sappers and Miners went out to clean up the field, they brought back an



An Indian Brigade H.Q. below the Ruweisat Ridge.

engrossing tally. Ten panzers had been destroyed beyond the necessity for demolition. Fourteen others, including a recaptured Honey tank, had been blown up. Six armoured cars, one self-propelled Storm gun, five medium anti-tank guns, five 37-mm. anti-tank guns, eight 75-mm. field guns, and six of the famous 88-mm. dual purpose guns, made up the total of the scrap metal on the Indian Brigade's front. In other words, Rommel had mounted a full-scale attack with all arms in close support and the blaze of 6-pounder fire had spared none of them. From that time onwards until the Indians came to have their own 6-pounders, sepoys passing these venomous little cannon could not forbear to stop and to pat them affectionately.

On the morning of July 17, a flying wedge of Australians raided southwards along the Alamein-Qattara trail, taking some hundreds of prisoners. That evening the Rajputana Rifles resumed their harassing role. A company led by 2nd-Lieutenant Nand Lal Kapur advanced through a gap in the minefield for some thirteen hundred yards with the intention of attacking an enemy machine-gun post. Suddenly enemy tanks loomed over a ridge eight hundred yards away. Without means to meet the threat, Kapur ordered his men to lie down, while he walked calmly up and down in front of them. The tanks edged up slowly to within five hundred yards of the Rajputana Rifles, and opened fire. But they apparently feared a trap, as they made no attempt to charge. At nightfall the company withdrew, owing its immunity to Kapur's boldness.

On the afternoon of July 19 the West Yorkshires of the 9th Indian Brigade, suddenly dashed out from the cover of Point 64 and progressed for over three thousand yards along the ridge before the enemy panzers mustered to stop them. British armoured forces were following in close support of the Yorkshire-

men and night fell on another tank battle. Over the air, in the form of intercepts, came evidence that the enemy tank commanders did not like the job in hand. They abandoned code as they went into battle and their conversations were interesting. One enemy pick-up vehicle complained that the "slanguage" used by the British tank men made interpretations difficult. It was too flippant for sober warfare. Another intercept asked plaintively if the objective must be overrun at all costs. When some discretion was given in the matter, the "Heil Hitler" which came over the air had a note of thanksgiving in it.

On the next evening the 161st Brigade joined the 9th Brigade in a further small advance. A series of fluctuating encounters ensued. It had now become manifest that the German armour was no longer the arbiter of battle. With British tanks and 6-pounders following close behind their infantry, Rommel dare not commit his panzers unreservedly to the attack. Day by day British gun power mounted and the initiative passed from the enemy, never to be regained in the African campaign.

Rommel's Last Bid

On the Ruweisat front after the end of July the position became stabilised, and the three Indian Brigades settled down to routine existence in one of the least pleasant spots in the world. From the main coastal road a steel mesh roadway covered the soft sand for several miles southwards, into the lee of the high bluff which marked the eastern end of Ruweisat Ridge. The ridge itself was of rough stone with a few inches of fine dust, which arose in dense clouds with every passing vehicle. In most places saucer-shaped sangars represented the only possible protection. The heat and the flies were almost beyond endurance. The long pencil of the ridge was a favourite Stuka target,

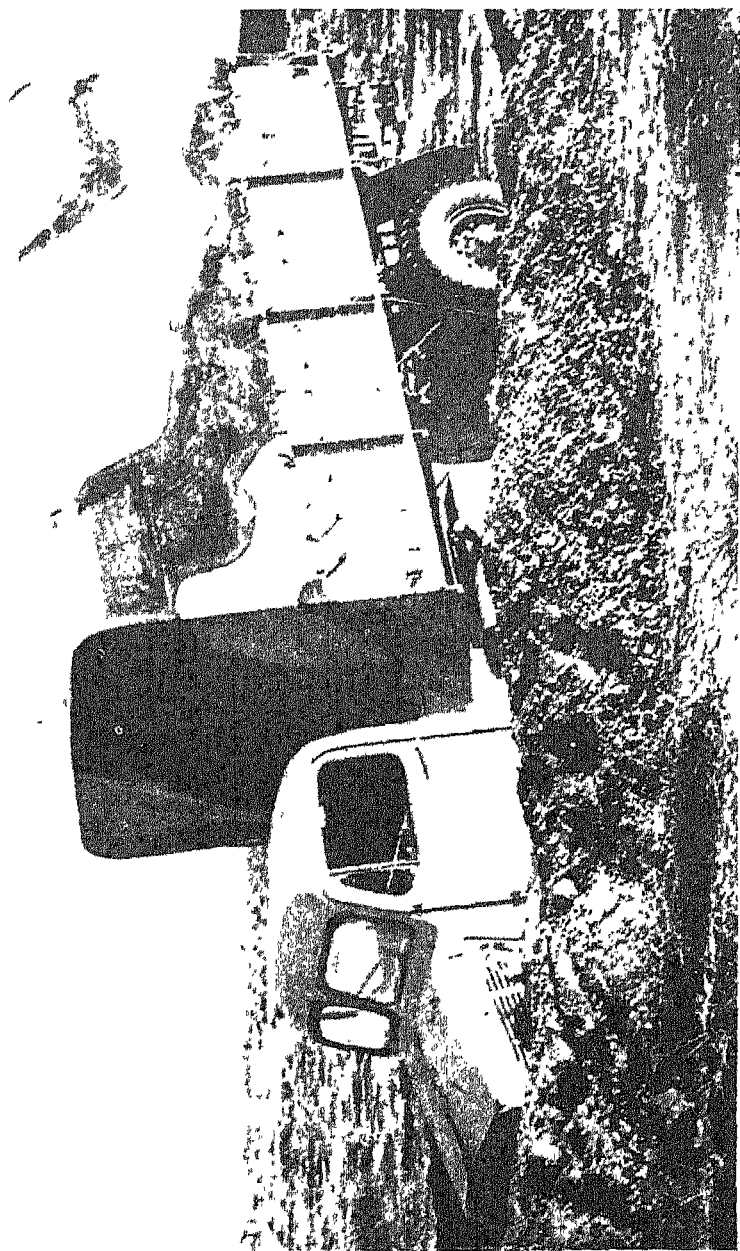
and at such strongholds as Point 64, the rhythmic crumping of the Bofors announced the approach of dive bombers several times in each day. Periodically harassing artillery fire searched the ridge. But the great enemy was boredom, for few of the amenities of life could be provided on this desolate rocky crest. On memorable days lorry loads of troops crossed the valley to bathe in the sapphire Mediterranean and to pluck figs in the deserted orchards among the coastal dunes; and on certain very rare occasions, to have an afternoon glimpse of the shops and sane ordered life of Alexandria, sixty miles away.

At long last the Essex were able to have a rest. Since early in June they had been constantly in action, and they could regard the Ruweisat Ridge as peculiarly their own. With ROBCOL they had helped to hold it at the beginning and since then they had been ever on it, pushing forward, helping to hold, living under terrible conditions. Not a man was free of lice, many were down with dysentery, but this magnificent British battalion, which had had the fiercest introduction to the desert imaginable, was still as pugnacious as ever.

Throughout these months the work of war went steadily on. Mr. Churchill came and everyone rejoiced; General Auchinleck left, and everyone felt that a great man had gone. Back on the Suez Canal the ships were disgorging mountains of everything—new guns by the hundred—acres of ammunition and tanks—new divisions, one of which swaggered, for it was the 51st Highlanders, whose fame was now two wars old. A tough little dark man wearing a beret arrived and took command of the Eighth Army. General Alexander gave him an open and unqualified instruction—to write finish to Rommel and the campaign in Africa. To this end he could draw upon the full resources of the British Empire and the United States.

No one knew better than Rommel that time was running out. At the end of August he made his bid. He had received reinforcements both in armour and in the air, and he had been sent some new Italian Divisions, of which one at least (Folgore) was known to be first class. As soon as his new strength could be mustered he put it to the test. Leaving the veteran Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans and Indians unmolested, he attempted one of his favourite hook movements far to the south where the new 44th British Division with Frenchmen and Greeks, held the left of the Alamein line. But behind these newcomers the British armour, now amounting to almost four complete Divisions, was on the *qui vive* and with the tanks there moved regiment after regiment of 6-pounders. On the morning of August 30 Rommel struck in a last attempt to burst the line which covered Egypt. After some initial penetration the panzers met the main body of the British armoured forces. They ran into an inferno of gunfire, and left sixty tanks and six hundred other vehicles blazing on the battlefield. Two days later Rommel hastily cut his losses and proclaimed that his advance had only been a "reconnaissance in force." The results of this battle took him post-haste to Berlin. There on October 3, when his Marshal's baton was placed in his hand, he spoke defiantly. "We hold the Gateway to Egypt with the full intention to act. We did not go there with any intention of being flung back sooner or later. You can rely on our holding fast to what we have got."

Rommel's boast had twenty days to live. For now the Alamein line, once no more than groups of desperate men, was as tight as a bow string with the arrow upon it. The arrow was pointed into the north, and those great fighters, the 9th Australian Division, the 1st South African Division, the 51st Highland Division, the New Zealand Division and the 4th Indian Division formed the arrowhead. Behind the infantry, four



Even the lorries have slit trenches.

Armoured Divisions waited; and along the ten-mile front from the Mediterranean to the southern edge of Ruweisat Ridge, there was concentrated such gun-power as had not been assembled elsewhere in this war.

On September 9, the 5th Indian Division was relieved at Ruweisat by the 4th Indian Division. This only meant a change of one Brigade. The 7th Brigade returned from garrison in Cyprus to replace the 9th Brigade; the 5th Brigade remained, rejoining its own Division, and the 161st Brigade likewise stayed on the ridge. All three battalions of the 161st Brigade had been in the 4th Division previously. The 1st Field Regiment also returned to the fold but it was some months before the 31st Field Regiment rejoined. The men of this Division now bore on their shoulders black flashes showing a Red Eagle in flight—the gift of women of the Punjab, at the instance of the late Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, Prime Minister of the Punjab, who had lately visited the Middle East. In the next year these Red Eagles were destined to fly far.

The harassing policy continued—never give the enemy a full night's sleep, keep him tense always against the blow to come. Thus September passed, and October began with chill winds and rain. The word began to go around that it would not be long.

Saving Lives

During those days of waiting the 4th Indian Division continued to patrol, to raid and to harass, bringing all their courage and cunning to the task of pinning the enemy down and of killing him. But it is pleasant to record that during these same weeks while the embattled nations organised, organised for death on the grand scale, one man at least was preparing to save lives which had not been saved hitherto. He was Lieut.-Colonel G. S. N. Hughes, commanding the 26th Indian Field Ambulance of the 4th Indian

Division. The appointed task of a Field Ambulance is to dress wounds and to evacuate the wounded expeditiously. Major operations are not its job. The Advanced and Main Dressing Stations formed by a Field Ambulance have constantly to pack up and move, which would be fatal in many cases for men resting after the shock of a serious operation. The place for skilled surgeons must be further back, where everything is to hand in a place free from the dirt, noise and danger of battle. But mortality of belly wounds varies directly with the period before operation and it was Colonel Hughes' ambition to try to save the lives of men so wounded.

Hughes had served his time as Medical Officer at Cossipore Ordnance Works. He had metal-workers' fingers and the desert was strewn with scrap. Scrap, plus his own ideas, plus willing fitters in mobile workshops, was all that he required. Two captured Italian vehicles were sawn in two and joined ingeniously to make an operating theatre. The operating lamp standard was fashioned from the gear handle of a derelict truck. Petrol tins appeared in a dozen disguises as clinical fittings. Surgical instruments were begged of the base or captured from the enemy. As the quiet months went by, picking up something here, scrounging something there, Colonel Hughes planned for the battle to come with the same energy and foresight as those who mustered the implements of death. His reward soon came. As Alamein opened, two sepoys, a Sikh and a Gurkha, fell with the grave wounds for which immediate treatment offered the sole hope. Within thirty minutes of being struck these two men were on the operating table in a bid for their lives. The Sikh eventually died, but the Gurkha lived, the first of several who survived owing to the energy of this doctor.

This is but one example of thousands of episodes in which devoted Englishmen and Indians of the

Indian Army Medical Corps brought succour, comfort and life itself to the fighting men whom they served.

The Battle of Alamein

At 9.30 p.m. on Friday, October 23, under a brilliant moon, the Alamein front erupted with the crash of one thousand two hundred guns. A vast crescent of flame raked the enemy's front in depth. Thirty minutes later, Scottish, English, South African and Australian infantry moved unimpeded towards the ring of flares which called desperately to the enemy guns for help. Further south the Indian Division threw in raids to pin down the foe. As day followed day, the strategy of "thumbing" the enemy away from the coast unfolded. Bit by bit Rommel was forced to concentrate his Armoured Divisions, scattered at the start of the battle over the entire front, into the pouch in the north. Then came the "Charge," and the Eighth Army bit deeply into the pouch. When complete concentration had been imposed upon the enemy, the pcleaxe was ready to fall. The final blow was to be the "Supercharge," when the enemy panzers, already committed to critical encounter, would be struck from a new quarter.

In these ten days the men of the 4th Indian Division had been something more than spectators and something less than participants in the main battle. Their task of containing their adversaries, without committing themselves to outright attack, had been well and truly done. No enemies moved from the Indian Division's front to reinforce the hard-pressed Divisions in the north. The work was done by raids, patrols, small attacks which bit little pieces out of the enemy line and a constant activity that made the foe fear assault was imminent.

On the night that the main attack went in, raiding parties went out from the Division, while the Royal Sussex and 7th Rajputs simulated a full-scale attack

from the end of the ridge. In the principal raid the 2nd Gurkhas assailed Point 62, a strong point which had had the benefit of their attention on many occasions. It consisted of a number of stone sangars on a slight hillock, surrounded at thirty yards by a belt of wire and anti-personnel mines. In front was a thick belt of anti-tank mines.

At 11 p.m. the artillery opened and the raiding party, consisting of three armoured carriers and two platoons of Gurkhas, with a detachment of Madras Sappers and Miners for lifting mines, passed through the British wire. In front went the carriers under Jemadar Harakbahadur Thapa. They came under heavy fire and each carrier had one of its crew wounded, but they reached the edge of the minefield and there stopped. Out jumped the "throwers." These three men ran forward through the minefield and chucked their grappling irons over the two fences of barbed wire. Back came the "throwers" through the hail of fire, clambered in, and then the carriers began to tow the wire away. One carrier was immobilised at once; the tow rope of another was cut by a bullet, but the third succeeded in pulling out a large section of wire, at the same time exploding some of the mines.

Led by Lieutenant Carrick, the leading platoon rushed through the gap. One section was practically wiped out straight away, but Carrick reached the main sangar with two riflemen. The officer was killed at once, and the two riflemen were hit, one fatally, while throwing grenades into the sangar. Meanwhile the remainder of the platoon had cleared the four lower sangars, killing eight Germans. Then the withdrawal began, covered by the fire of the other platoon which had failed to get through the wire. The Gurkhas' losses were eight killed and seventeen wounded.

During the next three days and nights, patrols and raids continued, but then began a difficult series



Gurkhas with one of their British officers.

of side-steps to take over sections of the line from the South Africans. On the right of the Division was the 5th Brigade. The Essex, Rajputana Rifles and Baluchis continually edged forward, seizing more and more of the enemy's lines. It might be only one hundred yards, or it might be as much as five hundred, but each bit was consolidated and a further bite made the following night.

By November 1 many of Rommel's panzers were trapped in the pocket on the coast. The hour had struck for "Supercharge." The 5th Indian Brigade was given the task of making ready for it. Under cover of a barrage, the Brigade was to cut a pathway through the enemy minefields and defences, and let the British tanks through. The move to the forming up line was of extraordinary complexity, involving pulling back from the front line followed by a twelve-mile approach march, mainly by night, through soft sand.

Stukas attacked the columns as they moved up on the evening of November 3, but inflicted little damage. Then night fell, pitch black, and the Brigade struggled forward through the soft sand. The Baluchis got hopelessly bogged but continued the march on foot. The attack was due to start at 1.30 a.m., but half an hour before this the Brigade was not ready. Brigadier Russell sent an urgent message for the barrage to be postponed for an hour, and by brilliant staff work this was done.

At 2.30 a.m. a concentration of four hundred guns opened on a front of eight hundred yards, and the barrage began to march across the minefields and defences at a pace of one hundred yards in three minutes. This devastating wedge of steel moved like a shield before the Essex and Rajputana Rifles. It poured down a cataract which cleansed the ground of every deadly device. One officer said that it was so

precise that his men could have leaned against it; another, that his only casualties were those who followed the wall too closely and became queasy from the fumes of explosives. Lines of tracer shell marked the borders of the corridor which the guns cut. A few short savage fights occurred as enemies, who had escaped the torrent of metal, sought to sell their lives dearly.

At 5 a.m. the barrage stood still for half an hour while the infantry mopped up and re-formed behind it. Then on it went inexorably for another sixty-five minutes. Another halt, of twenty minutes this time, and then once again it crept forward. Now the infantry were beyond the range of field guns, but mediums and heavies took up the work, so accurately that few noticed the change. Towards dawn the Essex and Raj Rif saw dim shapes in the gloom as the screen of armoured cars moved up behind them. They felt cheered for, as an Essex officer put it, it was getting lonely up there.

As the night thinned there was a sudden silence. The barrage lifted and was done. A short sharp fight took place, which was quickly decided in our favour. The enemy tried to break off the engagement, limber up their guns and get away, but a swift charge by the Essex carriers nipped that idea in the bud. The kidney-shaped ridge was in our hands. The 5th Brigade had gone clean through the enemy lines to a depth of over eight thousand yards. Then came thunder out of the east as rank after rank of tanks came roaring past, plunged through the infantry and turned north for the kill. The sun rose on the last of Alamein.

Work was not done for the tired 5th Brigade. After the tanks had gone the Brigade moved west and south and took up a line behind the southern portions of the enemy's defences, facing not west but east. Prisoners were taken, but there was little

that the Italians could do. They had insufficient transport to escape, and there was no alternative between surrender and death of thirst in the desert.

Mobile columns from other units in the Division went out scouring the desert for the defeated enemy. One column under Lieut.-Colonel Lovett (2nd Gurkhas), consisting of a company of the 2nd Gurkhas, six armoured carriers, a machine-gun platoon of the Raj Rif and a troop of anti-tank gunners, met a large part of the Italian Brescia Division retreating westward. At once the column charged. Three carriers swung west, attacked and captured six Italian medium tanks! In the meantime the anti-tank gunners were fighting four large German tanks and drove them off. The speed and determination of the attack by this tiny force had truly astounding results. One hundred officers, including the Division Commander, two thousand, one hundred and ninety-two other ranks, seventeen field guns, numerous anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns and a vast quantity of motor transport were captured. It was a fitting finale to this very complete victory.

A congratulatory message was received from the Commander of the 30th Corps, under whom the 5th Brigade operated for the break-through. It was, he said, the extraordinary deep penetration made by the Brigade which enabled the Armoured Divisions to be passed through with such great success. "I wish the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade were staying under my command."

SEVENTEEN

Storming The Mareth Line

ROMMEL'S broken army rolled back out of Egypt, across Cyrenaica and towards Tripolitania, at a speed unmatched by any previous retreat or advance. Yet out of the twelve Divisions arrayed against him on the Alamein line, eight took no part in the chase. The Highlanders and the New Zealanders, accompanied by two Armoured Divisions, earned the honour of harrying the broken enemy. They did their job well. Soon the familiar terrain was behind them, and Rommel had taken temporary refuge in his bolt-hole at El Agheila.

The 4th Indian Division, lightly engaged at Alamein, watched the pursuit with mixed feelings. The remark of one officer when rearguard brushes were reported between Beda Littoria and Barce, was characteristic. "Damn it! It's our Jebel," he said in disgust. The task assigned, of picking up scrap on the Alamein battlefield, was something less than the men of the Red Eagle Division felt that they deserved; so they gave vent to their feelings by turning in one thousand five hundred tons of salvage daily against an assigned quota of two hundred and fifty tons.

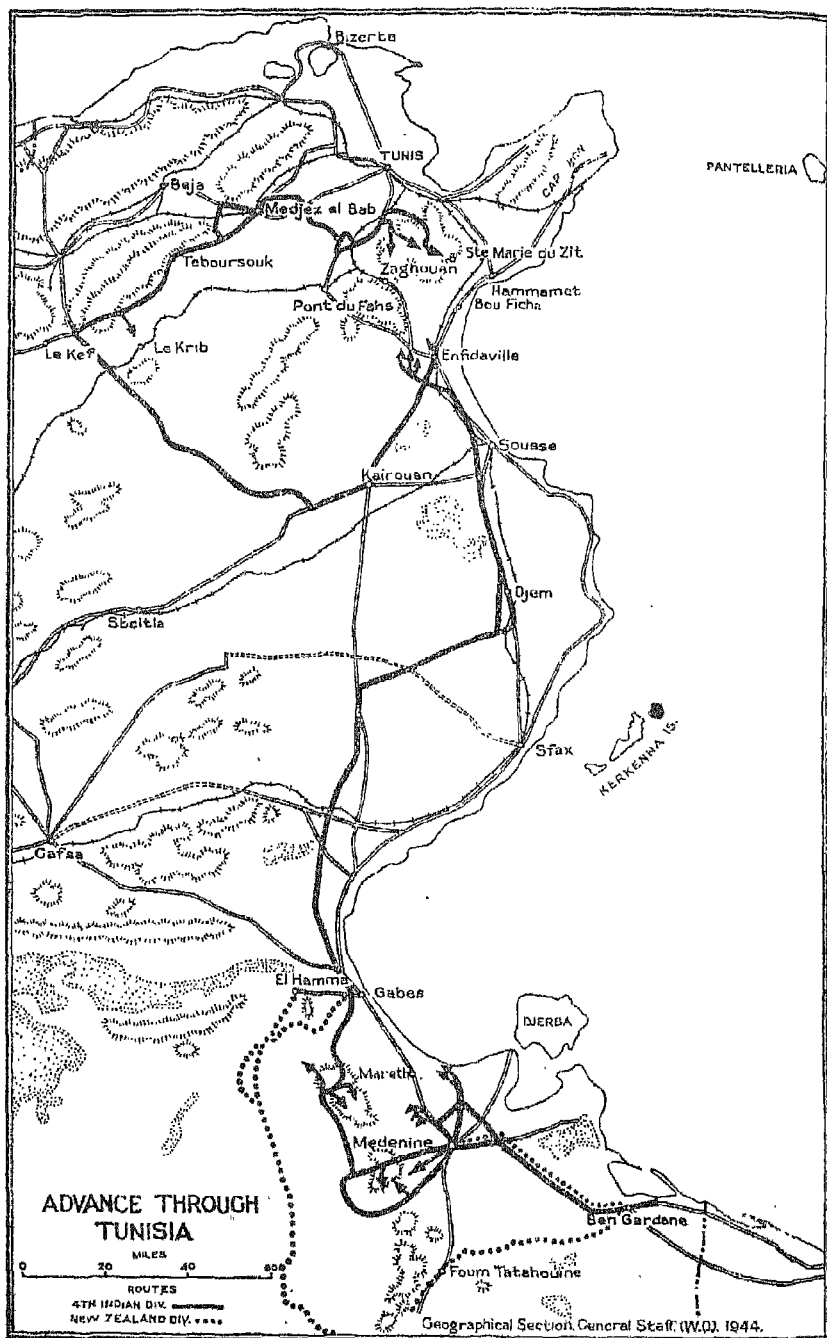
Action was, however, in the offing. If Rommel should decide to make a stand before Tripoli was reached, the 4th Indian Division and the 50th

Northumbrian Division, constituting the 10th Corps, would enter the battle. In the meantime the 5th and 7th Brigades moved up into Cyrenaica and trained intensively. Now for the first time the men were taught street fighting, an indication of the different role ahead. Parties were also employed unloading and clearing stores from Benghazi, now the forward base of the Eighth Army.

Throughout January and February, however, through a bleak wet winter, the British and Indians worked steadily at their tasks, hoping that every day might bring the call. Rommel slipped away from Agheila, and dropping swiftly back, made no more than a pretence of covering Tripoli. Mussolini's last African city fell, and of the 4th Indian Division only platoons of the Rajputana Rifles and Baluchis were there. (The B.B.C. and certain newsreel cameramen perpetrated a *gaffe* by describing the turbaned Sudanese troops at the triumphal entry as Indians.) The pursuit pounded on along the Mediterranean shore, now curving to the north-west, until at one hundred and seventy miles beyond Tripoli a series of sharp Sierra-like ridges out of the plain. This is the Matmata group of mountains. From the northern flank of this massif a number of deep wadis cut across the coastal plain. Just to the east of the little town of Mareth, the most abrupt of these wadis, Zig Zaw, marked the outworks of the famous Mareth Line. This fortification, originally built by the French and stripped by the Italians on the fall of France, had been hurriedly re-equipped by the retreating Axis forces. Here Rommel elected to stand at bay.

On To Tunisia

General Montgomery immediately prepared to mount an attack. At the end of February the call came. Advance elements of the 10th Corps, of which the 4th Indian Division formed a part, pushed forward



from Benghazi on March 3. They were now in new country. Beyond Agheila for two hundred miles the desert showed little change, but the increase in cultivated patches proved that rainfall was increasing. Almost imperceptibly the country continued to improve, until to the east of Tripoli it became wholly arable, and fairly well settled with neat olive groves, citrus plantations fed by irrigation, and fields in which the winter sowings were already showing green. Beyond Tripoli good land alternated with bad, and a coastal road ran through rolling pastureland, across salt-marsh causeways; among date plantations, and through dusty little Arab villages with a few fishing smacks pulled up on the beach. The desert was gone, and after the Tunisian frontier was crossed near Ben Gardane, the countryside stretched away in long downs, clad with springy turf, already gay with the first spring flowers. A few miles north-east of Medenine, Division Headquarters was set up on March 15, and the 7th Brigade moved forward to take over a sector of the Mareth front from a Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division.

Facing the enemy once more, the Brigade at once began a series of harassing night patrols. The Mareth Line was held in strength across the coastal strip, but among the foothills of the Matmatas massif, only detached enemy outposts kept watch. In such terrain the Indians' gifts for silent *shikar* had full play. A number of successful cutting-up parties ensued, of which the most notable was a 2nd Gurkha Rifles patrol under the command of Captain Ramsay-Brown, M.C., which overran several German machine-gun posts for a toll of fourteen killed and two prisoners.

One of these exploits had an interesting aftermath in the United States. The patrol was accompanied by an intrepid American correspondent, George Lait of International News Service. Lait's story hit the

front pages of many of the great American newspapers. For the first time the insatiable American reading public heard of the Gurkhas. Other American correspondents were deluged with telegrams from their newspapers asking why they had not been told of the Gurkhas before. The groundwork had been laid, and when the prodigious feat of Fatnassa occurred, the Gurkhas had their few shining days of American hero-worship.

In the meantime plans for the Mareth attack were completed, a classic Montgomery right-jab, left-hook plan. The 50th Northumbrian Division was to storm the wadi Zig Zaw and pierce the Mareth fortifications. The 4th Indian Division was to pass through and complete this rupture along the excellent road, which ambled past the Matmata foothills between Medinine and Gabes. At the same time the New Zealand Division, with a strong force of tanks, would swing in a wide half-circle round the southern flank of the Matmata mountains, to emerge after a march of nearly two hundred miles on the Gabes plain, in the rear of the Mareth position. Both actions were meant to be decisive. Either Rommel would be forced to throw his panzers into support of the Mareth Line, or he would have to fight to a finish on the open plains behind.

The Wadi Zig Zaw

The 151st Brigade of the 50th Division attacked on the night of March 20/21, forced its way across the wadi Zig Zaw, and established a bridgehead. The 5th Indian Brigade immediately moved up to pass through, but at the last moment it was decided not to commit them to the attack until the Northumbrian Division had strengthened its hold on the northern bank. A small force of Valentine tanks had been rushed across the wadi, damaging the existing roadway, and it was necessary to build new crossings before further wheeled vehicles could be taken over. Immediately after the



Seppers and Miners building a road through the hills

first attack, the Sappers of the 50th Division, in the brief period between dusk and moonrise, made a beginning on one crossing. They suffered heavy casualties and had to be withdrawn. On the afternoon of March 22, an enemy counter-attack drove in the Tynesiders and destroyed most of the tanks. Only a small bridgehead remained.

It was then decided that the Indian Division would not participate in the direct attack on the wadi Zig Zaw, but would relieve a British Motor Brigade further south, in the plain fronting the main Matmata massif. The Northumbrian Division, however, would make a further attempt to breach the Mareth Line. To do so it must have crossings. The 4th Indian Division was ordered to build such crossings.

A reconnaissance was made by engineer officers of the Division led by the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel J. H. Blundell. Colonel Blundell, a tall man of great personal charm, was one of the best-known figures in the 4th Division. He was completely devoid of fear, and was usually found in his spare moments in the midst of captured enemy mines and booby traps, which he investigated expertly, but with the joy of a school-boy. Next to infernal machines his great pride was his men, of whom he could never say or for whom he could never do enough. As a result of his reconnaissance, the 11th Madras Field Park Company was given a few hours in which to make up one hundred and fifty fascines, ten feet in length and about two feet in diameter. These were to be placed in position in the wadi to form the base of the bridges: steel mesh would be stretched over them to carry the vehicles. Cuttings were to be made through the walls of the wadi, and ramps were to be built down into its bottom. The 12th and the 4th Field Companies would then complete the crossings begun by the Northumbrian engineers, and also a second crossing one hundred and fifty yards away.

Full moon was on March 20. On March 22, in the two hours between dusk and moonrise, the Indian Sappers carried their stores to position just short of the wadi. The plan called for the infantry attack to go in at 7 p.m. on March 23, before the moon rose. At the last moment, however, it was decided that the bridges must be built before the infantry attack, and the Indian Sappers and Miners, instead of supporting the attack, were given the honour of leading it.

Shortly after midnight on March 23, under the light of a full moon the 4th and 12th Field Companies approached the wadi and dropped into it through gaps in the eastern bank. The enemy opened fire and British covering detachments immediately replied. From lip to lip of the wadi, over the heads of the Indian Sappers, tracer shell, mortars and sheets of machine-gun fire sped; a certain amount of cross fire also swept down the wadi. Guns chimed in, laying down heavy barrages on both sides. Between two walls of shell, the Indians grappled with their task.

Colonel Blundell took personal command. He moved among his men, instructing and exhorting them. He pointed out how safe they were, since a man of his height could walk upright without risk. But he did not show them the peak of his cap, for a bullet had torn it: nor did he tell them that he had covered a wounded havildar with his own body when snipers directed their fire upon the fallen man.

The eastern approaches of the wadi were blocked with vehicles bringing up infantry for the assault. The Sapper lorries carrying the steel mesh could not get through. The crossings, therefore, were incomplete when the time came for the infantry to attack. At 1.45 a.m. the Indian Sappers withdrew to make way for the assault. Their work was over, they might have been pardoned if they had sprinted to the rear through the wall or shell which the enemy's guns cast upon

the eastern bank of the wadi. But infantry was there, waiting, and the sight of men running back might have disconcerted them. So the Indian Sappers and Miners moved back through the barrage at a slow walk, without any haste, carrying their tools, chatting and joking, and in every way making the occasion commonplace. Colonel Blundell stopped often to speak to infantry officers, explaining the situation. Without orders the Sappers near him halted, waiting for him to move on before they too continued towards safety. This cool behaviour was not wasted on the battalions waiting to attack. More than one infantry report testifies to the heartening effect of the calm and confident bearing of the Indian Sappers and Miners.

The infantry surged across the wadi and threw themselves on the strong points beyond. The battle grew fiercer. The area around the wadi Zig Zaw became a solid block of dust and fumes shot with flame, rising into the sky under the zenith moon. With the infantry across the wadi, the Indian Sappers returned to complete their task. For another hour and a half they worked furiously. The steel mesh still had not arrived, so with fascines and stones they built the crossings. At last they were satisfied that their causeways would bear wheeled traffic. Before dawn, with the battle still at its height, they withdrew for a second time through the barrage, slowly and competently as before.

The gallant Tynesiders had made good the further lip of the wadi, and the vehicles began to stream across. By dawn a breach had been made in the Mareth Line. But unfortunately a heavy rain-storm broke, and transformed the almost dry bed of the wadi Zig Zaw into a brawling torrent. The Germans saw their chance, and threw their heavy armour at the bridgehead. Vicious counter-attacks won home, and the British forces were flung back. All the labour and sacrifice

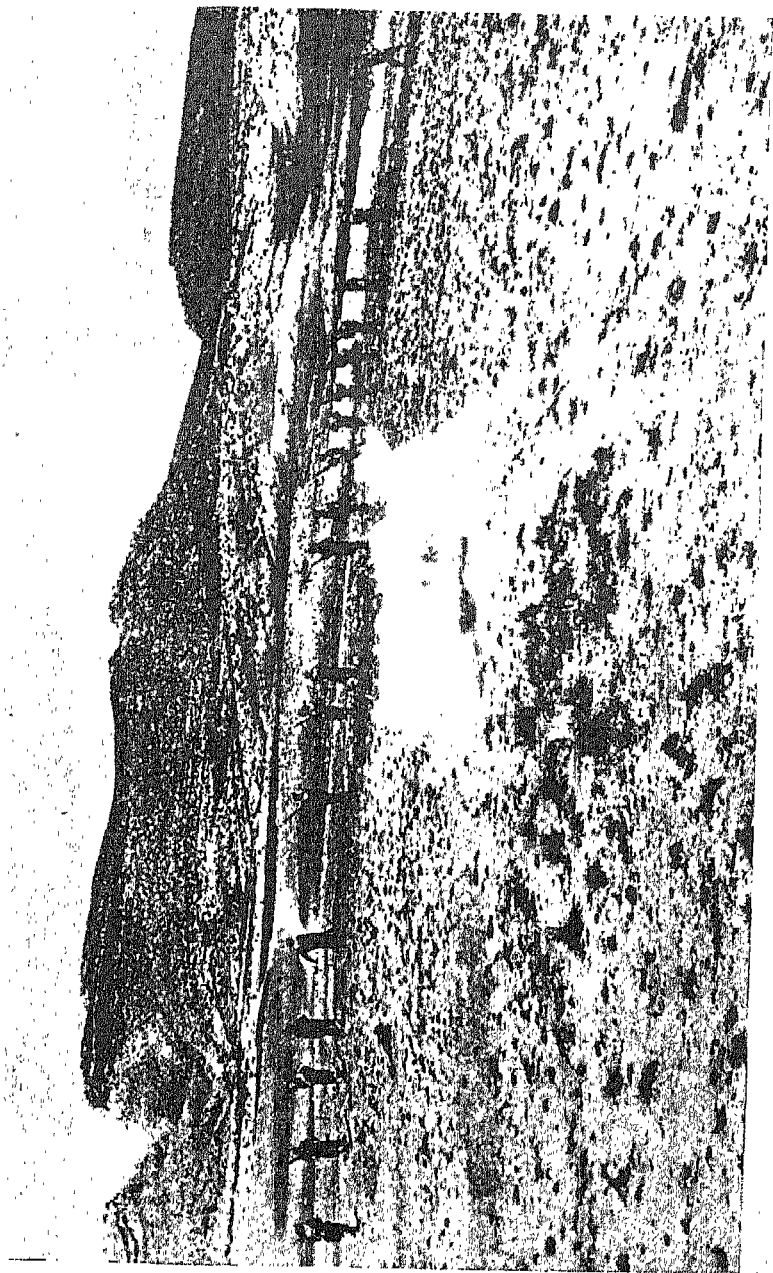
was brought to nought. The two armies stood snarling at each other across the wadi Zig Zaw.

While this battle was raging on the coastal plain, "D" Company of the 16th Punjab Regiment had been fighting a little battle all on its own on the left flank. In the early hours of March 21, before the main attack began, the company seized a hill from which enemy machine-guns could threaten the flank of the 50th Division. Ordered to hold the position at all costs the Punjabis stuck to the hill through almost continuous shelling, sniping and mortaring, and efforts of the enemy to dislodge them. The second-in-command, all platoon commanders, and many sepoy became casualties, but the Punjabis safely handed over their charge to the Seaforth Highlanders on March 24.

Into the Hills

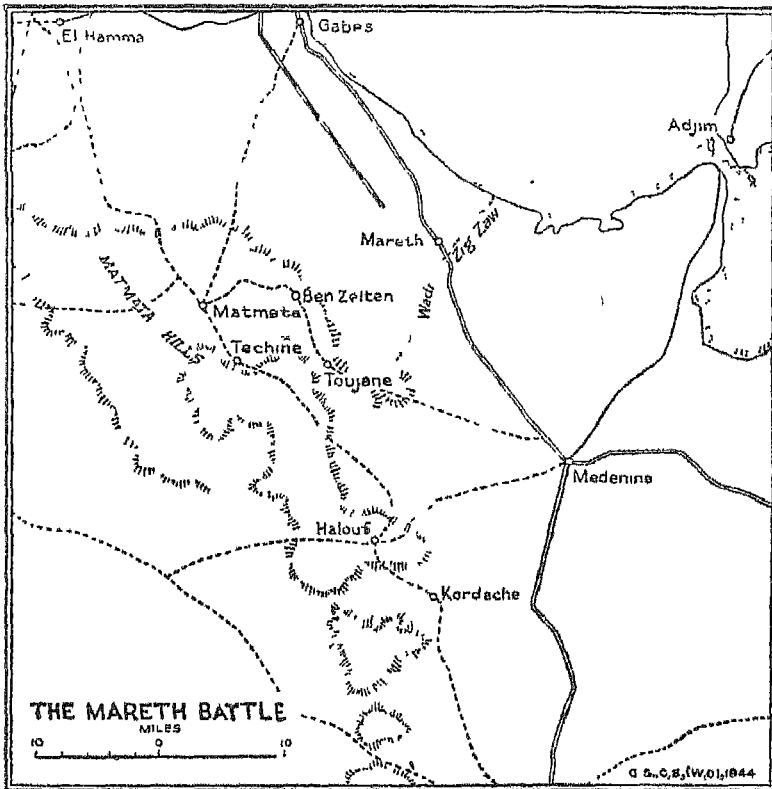
The "right-jab" had been blocked but the "left-hook," however, was well under way. By March 24, the New Zealanders with attached troops and a strong body of armour swung around the southern spurs of the Matmatas, and turned to the north-east in open ground in the rear of the enemy's position. The German armour was marshalled in a defensive line across the Gabes plain, and a major encounter became imminent. It was obvious that in a protracted battle the New Zealanders would find great difficulties in sustaining lines of communication over two hundred miles of desert track. A good motor road led from Medenine straight through the Matmata gorges, into the southern Gabes plain. If this road could be opened, more than a hundred miles would be cut from the New Zealanders' supply route. The job was given to the 4th Indian Division.

But in this operation there was an outside chance of bagging bigger game. From the Halouf highway one good road and a number of trails ran northwards to



The 16th Punjab Regiment advances to attack the ridges below Fatnassa.

Techine and to Toujane, villages on the very top of the Matmata mountains. If the Indian Division could reach these crests, it would stand immediately above the armoured battle in the Gabes plains below; and if it could find a way to descend into those plains speedily and stealthily, it could be thrown upon the



enemy's rear. General Tucker felt that he knew of such a way. From Techine the main road led down into Matmata village. This road doubtless would be destroyed. But a secondary and lesser-known trail found its way into the Gabes plains further to the north, through a tortuous ravine which led down to Ben Zeten. It was just possible that the enemy might have

forgotten or ignored this route; or being hustled, might have no time to destroy it. Wolfe won Canada by finding an unknown pathway up the heights of Quebec. The thousandth chance is sometimes worth trying. So the 4th Division's plan called for a drive at full speed towards the northern Matmata crests, where the brigades would transform themselves into mobile battle groups, and would manage somehow to get down into the Gabes plain while the battle there still hung in the balance.

On March 24, therefore, the 4th Indian Division moved south to confront the high central massif of the Matmata mountains immediately west of Medenine. Here the 5th and 7th Brigade separated, the former entering the mountains by way of Halouf Pass, while the 7th Brigade made a detour to the south to come in by the Kurdache Pass. The movement of the 5th Brigade was due west, and that of the 7th Brigade almost due north, with their axis designed to converge in the heart of the mountains, where the principal trails turn northward to Toujane on the crest of the range.

Leading the 5th Brigade advance, the 9th Gurkha Rifles thrust straight down the Halouf Road on the night of March 25/26. The road snaked between high buttresses and over dry wadis, with the peaks stark against the stars. Everywhere the roadway and its verges were sown with mines, and only the crown of the road was safe. When vehicles passed in opposite directions they clung to every inch of safety. They scraped and jostled rather than risk the perilous verges. In several places the cliff-side and the road had been blown away. Sappers and infantry laboured all night on detours and repairs.

Towards morning the Essex Regiment closed up on the Gurkhas in the pass, to find the hillmen held up by an extensive demolition. A cliff-side had been

blown away. A light patrol of the Essex passed the block in the road, and thrust on, overrunning a number of Italian rearguards. As soon as the road had been rebuilt, the main body of the Essex passed through, and without any great difficulties came out of the mountain defiles into the rolling ridges where the main road turns north to Toujane. The first or immediate objective had been obtained: the short route to the New Zealanders was open.

On the same night, the 6th Rajputana Rifles had entered the mountains by a defile to the north of the Halouf Road. Here a tortuous track led across the mountains towards the divisional objective of Toujane. The immediate task of the Raj Rif was to seize two peaks which were known to be held by the enemy. These high crags were named Cairo and Delhi. Clambering fifteen hundred feet in the dark, the Rifles took Cairo without undue opposition, but the platoon which reached a point half-way up Delhi met with heavy fire and was pinned down. When morning broke, part of the Raj Rif remained in the valley entrance to the pass, under heavy fire from mortars and guns situated on the peaks. When the time came for them to send out for supplies and to evacuate wounded, the divisional artillery emulated Jupiter's amorous device, and laid smoke clouds over the peaks which effectively obscured enemy observation and lessened his fire.

The 7th Brigade driving in from the south, had no luck. A minefield was encountered which neither could be pierced nor by-passed. Turning westwards in search of cleaner ground, another minefield barred the way. Yet within twenty-four hours of starting Brigadier Lovett and his men had reached the Halouf Road by the western gap in the Matmatas, and were following the 5th Brigade northwards along the main road towards Techine, a troglydite village where the inhabitants dwell underground and only the tombs are on the surface.

Throughout the morning of March 26, the Essex, followed by the 9th Gurkhas, swept ahead at a great pace, driving the enemy rearguards headlong, and foiling attempts to mine or to destroy the roads. The speed of the advance was such that a sapper officer, who accompanied forward patrols from hilltop to hilltop, was able to observe the Italians mining the roads after their rearguards had passed through; and having pinpointed such locations, was able to send detachments forward to raise the mines without further search or delay.

In the early afternoon, "C" Company, leading the Essex advance reached a junction of mountain trails which bore the operational name of HARDY. It was obvious that this junction would be defended, as it offered the first alternate tracks by which the enemy rearguards on the main road might be bypassed. It was a strong position, commanded by a ring of higher hills behind. "C" Company immediately came under heavy and accurate fire. A full-scale attack was impossible that evening, but at 8 a.m. next morning the Essex moved forward with artillery support to clear HARDY. There was no possible advance except along the road, which was swept by the enemy guns. A number of vehicles were hit and destroyed, and the road was blocked by them. General Taker came forward and ordered the position to be stormed at all costs. The damaged vehicles were pushed over the cliff-sides, and early in the afternoon the Essex threw in a most dashing attack. They carried HARDY with the bayonet, taking two hundred prisoners of the Pistoia Division.

The first of the by-passes to Toujane was therefore open. A few miles beyond HARDY a second trail allowed the advancing columns to cut in between Toujane and Techine. The 16th Punjabis, the leading battalion of the 7th Brigade, were rushed down this



**Brigadier D. R. Bateman, D.S.O., O.B.E., Commander of the 5th Indian
Infantry Brigade.**

cut-off towards Toujane, to protect the right flank of the 5th Brigade, and to isolate any of the enemy who might remain in the eastern spurs of the Matmatas. The 9th Gurkhas similarly moved down the second by-pass, and cut the main Tachine-Toujane road. The Essex pushed straight forward towards Techine.

It was getting exciting. The 4th Indian Division now had alternate routes, by which it could avoid any strongly held enemy positions, and its leading troops were only a few miles from the top of the pass which led down to Ben Zelten. The armoured battle had been joined on the plains, and an immediate descent must profoundly affect it.

That evening Brigadier Donald Bateman's* 5th Brigade found Techine clear of the enemy except for a small rearguard to the north of the village. At first light patrols advanced to the top of the Ben Zelten defile. An inspection confirmed the Divisional Commander's surmise that the enemy had not considered this pass to be worth blowing up. But the descending track was carried along the sides of the ravine on abutments of soft stone, and heavy rains had washed several large gaps in it. As it stood it was completely impassable, and it seemed as though at the last moment the 4th Indian Division must remain marooned on the mountain tops, while the battle unrolled below them.

A bulldozer was eased down to the first gap, and began to fill in behind the retaining wall. After eight hours of work, five different gaps were bridged. On the afternoon of March 28, after a delay of less than a day, traffic began to move down the pass. Shortly after midday, the 2nd Gurkhas reached the bottom, and swept through a narrow valley. A few minutes later New Zealand patrols were encountered on the

*Brigadier D. R. Bateman, D.S.O., O.B.E., had been Brigade Major of the 5th Brigade at Sidi Barrani and Keren. Then for a year and more he had been G.S.O.I. of the Division. After a short period as Commandant of a training school he returned to take command of his old Brigade.

open plain. They brought the news that the armour battle had ended in a disastrous enemy defeat. British tanks had entered Gabes. The Mareth Line was open, and the Eighth Army was sweeping forward on the heels of the retreating enemy.

This dashing and highly successful forcing of the Matmata gorges must have come as a glad surprise to the Commander of the Eighth Army. In desert warfare the infantry was no more than a supplementary instrument to the armoured encounter. Fighting in mountains is as highly specialised as jungle, desert or European warfare, and troops trained for one are not necessarily able to cope with another. The Eighth Army was now reaching mountainous country and here, ready to hand, was a Division that took to the hills like ducks to water. From Matmata onwards the 4th Indian Division was recognised as a specialised formation, to be employed wherever peaks and ranges barred the way.

EIGHTEEN

The Wadi Akarit

THE Mareth position had crumbled, and Rommel was forced to improvise a new bastion in the ring of the Tunisian defences. Elsewhere in Tunisia the battle had not been going badly for the defenders. The First British Army was held up along the peaks and valleys of the Medjerda, and the Americans had taken a nasty crack at Kasserine. Further south, and only eighty miles from Gabes, the 2nd American Corps was finding great difficulty in forcing the valley between Gafsa and El Guettar which would allow them to link up with the Eighth Army. But with the Americans so near, Rommel dare not risk an immediate retirement to his recognised "keep" position at Enfidaville, and unluckily for the Allies, a defensive position was near at hand. Twenty miles north of Gabes, a replica of the Mareth position exists. Near the coast the flat land narrows to a few miles in width, and the Zemlet el Beida springs out of the plain. Flanked for several miles by an approach of low rolling hills admirably sited for defence, its main features tower to command the countryside. The range consists of two main groups of peaks—Roumana to the north and Fatnassa to the south. They are joined by a hog's back of rolling hills four miles in length. Under the southern cliffs of Fatnassa, a first-class military road pierces the range.

South of the road, another feature, almost as high but less precipitous, marks the last of the really high ground. From thence southward the rocky outcrops continue to sink until they are lost in the El Hamma salt marshes.

The replica of Wadi Zig Zaw also exists in the Wadi Akarit, a deep and wide watercourse running from the coast for ten miles inland. This natural moat had been continued for three thousand yards by an anti-tank ditch which covered the hog's back of rolling hills, and terminated against the northerly escarpment of Fatnassa. The enemy therefore had two high peaks for observation and fire control, with admirable cover for his guns. The approaches to his defences could be raked obliquely from either side. The weakness of the position lay in its lack of depth.

It was apparent at a glance that on this battlefield no "left hook" could reach its mark. It therefore seemed that cost what it might, the Eighth Army must burst through on the coastal plain. The first plan, therefore, called for an attack a few miles inland from the sea coast, and a swing to the right pinning any enemy forces which might remain against the beaches. The role of the 4th Indian Division was to seize the commanding high ground at the northern end of the anti-tank ditch, and to hold it until the breach had been completed and the armour had passed through.

This plan left the Indian Division under observation and fire from the main peaks. Even if it succeeded, heavy casualties would be inevitable. General Taker therefore proposed, as an alternative, to extend the front, to move further south, and to storm the highest ground of all—the Fatnassa group of features directly north of the military road. If such attack succeeded, he would use a second brigade to overrun the hog's back which connected Fatnassa with Roumana. Passable tracks led across these hills into the plains



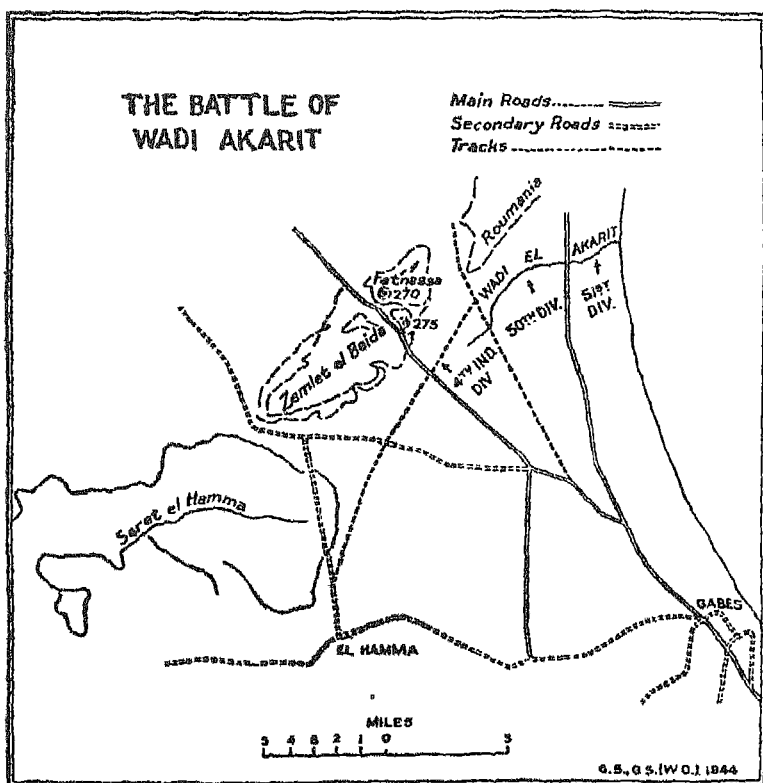
Battalion Headquarters of the 18th Punjab Regiment at the Battle of Wadi Akarit

beyond, and the British armour would have an alternate route across the mountain barrier. Moreover, a comparatively minor advance over the broken ridges which comprised the hog's back would bring the reverse slopes of Roumana under observation and fire, and the whole Akarit position might be made untenable.

It was a daring plan, for Fatnassa was no simple mountain, but a labyrinthine tangle of high ridges, interlaced escarpments, and twisty passages. In front of Fatnassa proper, a fjord-like valley separated the main peak from a long finger of high ground—the Mereb el Alig. This pencil-shaped ridge protruded for some fifteen hundred yards to the north-west, before broadening at its apex into two other high and precipitous features—Rass ez Zouai to the south and El Meida to the north. On the front of this massif—that is, facing the Indian Division's line of advance—a club-shaped promontory, Point 275, stood up boldly for eight hundred feet. The easiest approach to these features lay along a corridor between two steep escarpments, one of which swung to the west to form a natural amphitheatre against Point 275, and the other, continuing to the north, merged into El Meida in a high kopje, against which the anti-tank ditch ended. Every approach to this feature, therefore, permitted fire from direct observation, as well as cross fire from guns behind the strongly held hog's back. Furthermore, as the perimeter of the Rass ez Zouai feature was several thousand yards in length, a sizeable force must obtain a footing in order to defend it properly.

All this added up to a most difficult proposition, and General Taker considered that the only prospect of success lay in infiltration under cover of night, thus putting his men in possession of the dominant positions before the enemy was aware of his intentions. He therefore proposed to attack silently, without artillery

preparation, some hours before the assault by the 50th and 51st Divisions went in. In his opinion, while the Fatnassa system remained in enemy hands the success of the frontal attack on Roumana would be problematical; and he likewise knew that any success on his front would be decisive. The 7th Brigade therefore was ordered to attack the Fatnassa group of peaks. If its attack succeeded, the 5th Brigade would pass through swiftly and would turn the strongly



held anti-tank ditch which defended the hog's back. The 2nd Gurkhas (Lieut.-Colonel L. J. Showers) were deputed to make the main attack, while the Royal Sussex seized the right slopes of El Meida feature. The

16th Punjabis remained in Brigade reserve for use wherever needed.

Fatnassa

On the night of April 5 as soon as dark fell, both Brigades began to move forward across the rolling ridges which confronted the main peaks. After a march of four miles, the 7th Brigade reached its assembly point; looking half left, the men could see the high black line of the first escarpment, with the jagged peak of Point 275 reared above it. The 2nd Gurkhas quickly deployed, and following the tape previously laid, moved towards the first ridge two thousand yards ahead. "C" Company bore sharply left, while "D" Company turned towards the chimney-like entrance of the ravine between the two main escarpments.

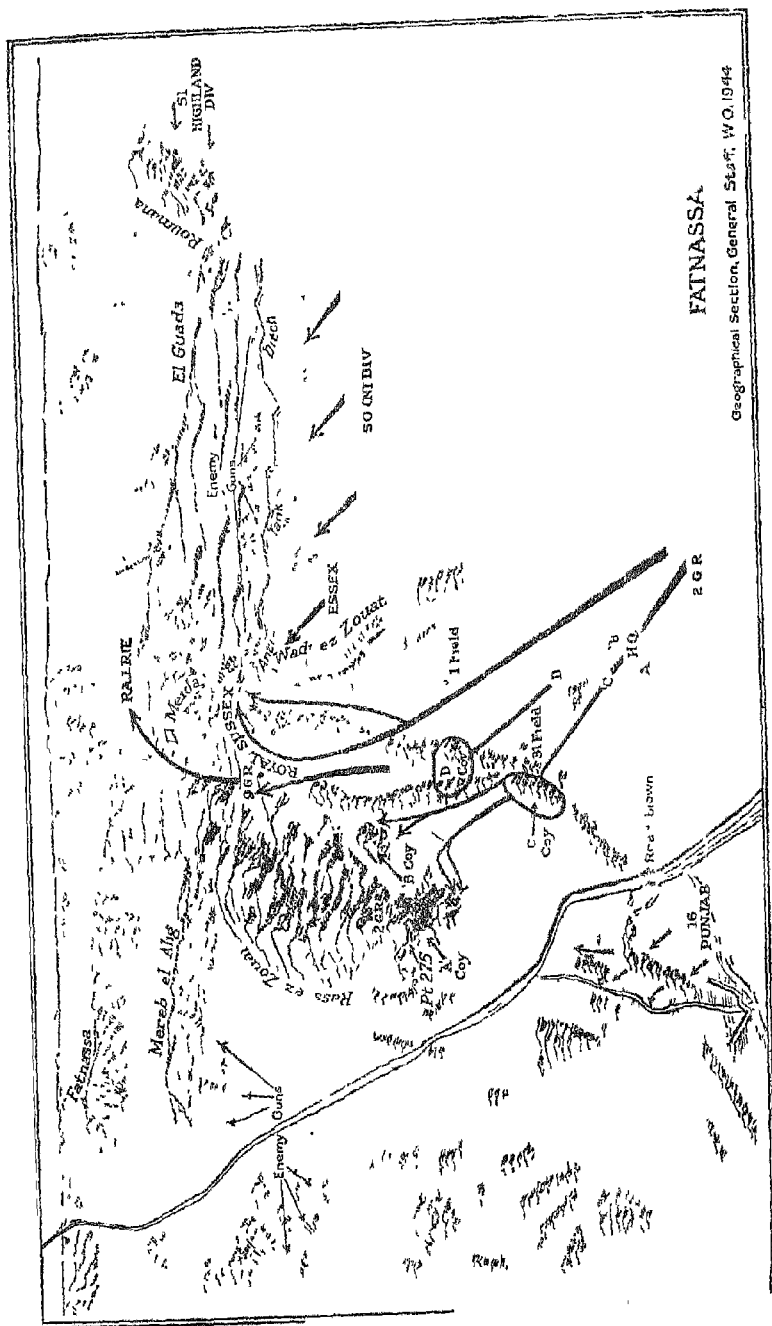
The men moved slowly, stopping regularly whilst scouts reconnoitred. The new moon had set, and a slight mist clung to the earth. Except for the clang of metal when the machine-gunners and the mortar teams shifted their loads, an occasional cough or the scraping of boots on gravel, no sound betrayed the coming assault. Several low ridges were crossed, and shortly after midnight, the first of the main escarpments towered ahead so sharply that the peak of Point 275 no longer could be seen. "C" Company came silently to its foot and began to climb. In the darkness a section of cat-eyed Gurkhas detected the first enemy post. They drew their *kukris* and soundlessly closed in.

The sentry in the first post to be reached was asleep. He never awakened. A throaty gurgle as the stroke went home, and the Gurkhas swarmed into the sangar, killing to the last man. Shouting broke out and a burst of fire swept from the crest of the escarpment high over the heads of the attackers. Then to those waiting at the foot of the cliff came an eerie sound—an excited whimper not unlike hounds finding

the scent—as the Gurkhas swarming up the escarpment guided each other in their high chattering voices. In a moment they swopt over the crest and down the line of the escarpment, cutting down every enemy who stood his ground.

“ A ” and “ B ” Companies immediately pushed forward up the cliff-sides, and through “ C ” Company. “ A ” Company bore left and worked its way across the broken ground to the foot of the almost sheer sides of Point 275. This peak is triangular in shape and finding no way upwards on its eastern approach, “ A ” Company swung left hand around its base to the southern face, above the deep valley through which the military road ran. An attack from this side apparently had not been expected and “ A ” Company made its way to the pinnacle without any great trouble, mopping up an artillery observation post on the very top.

“ B ” Company had been equally successful. Its first rush bore down along the northern line of the escarpment, and onto the high ground above the small natural amphitheatre. This brought them well in the rear of Point 275, and until communications could be established with “ A ” Company and with the rear, no further advance could be made. But now the first hitch occurred. The enemy was wide awake and was laying down heavy artillery and mortar barrages on the approach positions. A salvo of mortar bombs landed on 2nd Gurkha Headquarters, destroying all the battalion wireless sets, and also those of the artillery observation group, and wounding several officers. Colonel Showers immediately went forward to ascertain the position, but communications had to be passed by word of mouth. An anxious hour passed. All that was known at Battalion Headquarters was that “ A ” and “ B ” Companies had gone into the blackness, and were out of touch, and that in the chimney between



the two escarpments, where "D" Company had entered the hills, a lively battle was raging. Everyone waited with anxiety for the outcome of the fighting, for any failure to storm this dangerous and difficult corridor threatened to nullify the gains elsewhere.

But the dense darkness of that boulder-studded ravine hid a great feat of arms. Under command of Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa, two sections of Gurkhas had moved forward to secure the only pathway which led up the escarpment at the upper end of the rocky chimney. This trail reached the top of the hill through a narrow cleft, thickly studded with enemy posts. Anti-tank guns and machine-guns covered every foot of the way, while across the canyon, where the cliffs rose steeply for some two hundred feet, the crests were swarming with automatic gunners and mortar teams. Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa reached the first enemy sangar without challenge. His section cut down its garrison with the *kukri*. Immediately every post along the twisty pathway opened straight down the ravine. Without pause the intrepid subedar, with no room to manoeuvre, dashed forward at the head of his men through a sleet of machine-gun fire, grenades and mortar bombs. He leapt inside a machine-gun nest and killed four gunners single-handed, two with knife and two with pistol. Man after man of his section were stricken until only two were left. But rushing on, he clambered up the last few yards of the defile through which the pathway snaked over the crest of the escarpment. Once again he flung himself single-handed on the garrison of the last sangar covering the pathway and struck two enemies dead with his *kukri*. This terrible foe was too much for the remainder of the garrison who fled with wild screams for safety. The chimney between the escarpments was open, and with it the corridor through which the 5th Brigade would pass. It is scarcely too much to say that the battle of Wadi Akarit had been won, several hours before the



Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa, V.C., 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles.

formal attack began, by the dauntless valour of Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa.

The first hours of the fighting therefore saw the 2nd Gurkhas securely in possession of the outlying and dominant features of the Fatnassa massif, and waiting for dawn to exploit their victory. Concurrently the Royal Sussex Regiment had advanced on their right on a more or less parallel axis, with their objective the El Meida feature, a series of broken kopjes which formed the northern buttresses of the Fatnassa system. The Royal Sussex had followed closely behind the Gurkhas to the assembly area, and shortly after 9 p.m. they moved off into a narrow arena between the two escarpments. When the advance of the Gurkhas was discovered, a curtain of fire was laid down along the foothills and fell heavily upon the advancing Royal Sussex. As in the case of the Gurkhas, the signal sections suffered, and some confusion occurred in the darkness. It was not until the Gurkhas' success signal went up at 1.30 a.m., that the exact positions of the various companies of the Royal Sussex, in this difficult terrain, could be pinpointed. At 3.30 a.m. and again at 4.10 a.m. artillery concentrations were laid down for guidance on the predetermined spots, and the shoot showed the Royal Sussex to be about six hundred yards short of their objective. They were now on the ground commanding the southern end of the anti-tank ditch, and as dawn broke two companies arrived to clear the buttresses against which the ditch ended. One platoon charged with the bayonet, capturing a number of prisoners and four 65-mm. guns in the immediate rear of the anti-tank ditch. The Royal Sussex could see enemy guns only a few hundred yards away firing obliquely on to the 50th Northumbrian Division front where the attack was now in full swing. The captured guns were at once turned on the enemy battery positions. Simultaneously other platoons were mopping up pockets of enemy gunners in the wadis

along El Meida feature, and in the first light the Royal Sussex began to consolidate the grip on this all-important ground.

In the meantime the 16th Punjab Regiment had waited impatiently in the valley below the main ridges. This great battalion thought little of a plan of battle which left them in reserve. When fighting broke out after midnight, Lieut.-Colonel H. A. Hughes despatched one company under Captain W. G. Popple, to seize low ridges on the left of the main battle position. As these companies moved off, a heavy shoot came down on the crests ahead of them. Then through the night burst the yell that has rung over so many hills. The Punjabi Mussalmans were charging with their age-old war cry of "*Allah Ho Akbar.*" They swept over the ridges and cut down or captured every defender. When dawn broke, they found themselves looking down on the military road and the demolitions at the entrance to the pass. Their positions, however, were commanded by the very high feature on the southern side of the military road. The Punjabis were in no mood to have anyone above them. "D" Company therefore was despatched to seize this dominating group on the extreme left flank of the battle front. In all some eight hundred prisoners had been taken and captured mortars were used to good effect against their former owners.

The 5th Brigade Goes Through

Thus at dawn every unit of the 7th Brigade had made its ground and was in position to carry on the main battle throughout the day. But the 5th Brigade had not waited for a gap to be opened or for the position to clarify. Shortly before dawn companies of the 9th Gurkhas began to filter through the foothills below the narrow corridor so brilliantly cleared by Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa, and overrunning all opposition advanced for three thousand yards, deep into the

heart of the Fatnassa feature. A curtain of mortar fire descended upon them but the little hillmen got through, storming ridge after ridge, until they found a low valley below them full of Italians. They swept on taking many prisoners, and having made all objectives, halted to allow the Rajputana Rifles, pushing after them in close support, to pass through. This magnificent advance which yielded close on two thousand prisoners, was carried out at the very low cost of one killed and nineteen wounded.

Lieut.-Colonel R. B. Scott's Rajputana Rifles had been close up behind the 7th Brigade's position since 3 a.m. Following the line of advance of the Royal Sussex, they too swept up over the rocky knolls to the south of the anti-tank ditch, and swung sharply almost due north down a widening valley which led into the rear of the German forces holding up the 50th Division. The battalion was now about fifteen hundred yards behind the enemy's front line, but little opposition except scattered machine-gun posts was encountered. A certain amount of *shikaring* of these posts occurred, in which Subedar Abkar Khan and Havildar Sher Jang excelled. By mid-forenoon the Rajputana Rifles were looking into the rear of the Roumana feature and their carriers were cruising about the open plain behind the enemy's position. They had sent back nearly a thousand prisoners at the cost of less than fifty casualties.

There remains only the Essex Regiment to be accounted for. The Essex had been detached to follow through on the 50th Division's front and to escort the divisional transport through the hills. The Tyne-siders, however, had encountered heavy opposition in their frontal attack on the anti-tank ditch below the hog's back and one attempt after another to storm this obstacle failed. Before dawn Division Headquarters, realising there was no way through the 50th Division's

front, ordered the Essex to return to the Indian Division's area. Quickly off the mark, they marched along the line of battle and clambered over the escarpment at the western end of the anti-tank ditch, to assist in the drive into the rear of the enemy's stronghold on Roumana. Finding a possible crossing on the extreme southern end of the anti-tank ditch, the Essex put Italian prisoners at work building a bridge.

By sunrise the Divisional Commander could piece together the general picture. The 7th Brigade was definitely in control of the high ground confronting Fatnassa. The 5th Brigade had turned the anti-tank ditch defences and was mopping up in the enemy's rear. It could only be a matter of hours until the whole of the hog's back and the strong position which held the 50th Division at bay would go. At 8.45 a.m., General Tucker was able to report to Corps: "We have bitten six thousand yards out of the enemy's position. The gate is open. Turn your armour loose."

At every point therefore the silent infiltration attack had succeeded brilliantly. On the coast likewise the Highlanders had crashed through and had taken five thousand prisoners. It therefore seemed that at last Rommel had met his Nemesis. If armour in any strength could reach the open plains five miles away, it would be almost impossible for him to disengage the balance of his forces. But unfortunately there was some delay in getting the tanks through, and the Afrika Korps lived to fight just once more.

The Fight in the Hills

The battle was not yet over. The 5th Brigade had done its job and the Royal Sussex and Punjabis only had mopping up to follow. But another eighteen hours of bitter fighting awaited the two gallant Gurkha battalions, which held the highest ground of all, on

the broken summits of Rass ez Zouai and El Meida. When light broke over these precipitous crests the long finger of the El Alig feature could be dimly seen in the north. This rocky spur, three hundred yards wide and a thousand yards in length, had sheer cliffs on both sides. Leaving "A" Company in charge of Point 275, "B" and "C" Companies of the 2nd Gurkhas moved along the southern edge of Rass ez Zouai and shortly after sunrise secured the base of the El Alig promontory. Contact was made with the 9th Gurkhas, and "B" Company commenced to clear this pencil of high ground. Heavy fire was immediately opened from Fatnassa across the valley, but the Gurkhas pressed forward clearing the ridge, cutting down the defenders, and in some cases for good measure throwing them over the cliffs. They reached the tip of El Alig out of breath and almost out of ammunition. It was obvious that as long as the enemy held Fatnassa in strength, he could infiltrate up the valley and might be able to cut the narrow gut at the base of El Alig. Having cleared the feature, therefore, "B" Company withdrew to a more compact position at the northern end of the ridge.

The enemy was apparently unaware of his critical position on other parts of the front, for he remained full of fight in this sector. The tip of El Alig was immediately reoccupied and the enemy Tommy-gunners began to work their way forward. They also began to filter up the southern slopes of Rass ez Zouai. This placed a considerable strain upon the resources of the 2nd Gurkhas, as they had to cover a line of escarpment of nearly three thousand yards with no more than two companies. The enemy persistently endeavoured to wriggle up the slopes into commanding positions and all day guerilla warfare and individual stalking matches reigned among the boulders and wadis of the southern slopes of Rass ez Zouai. As the day wore on the Gurkhas began to run out of ammuni-

tion. More than once the defenders resorted to stones. One section rolled rocks on to the enemy in dead ground in order to flush them into the open where they might be killed.

All day likewise "A" Company on Point 275 was under a bombardment sufficiently heavy to presage counter-attack. During the afternoon it grew intense. The position was completely exposed and the Gurkhas clung to the bare rocks. However, the situation along the northern escarpment had eased through the passage of the 5th Brigade, and that afternoon "D" Company was withdrawn from the rocky chimney which it had won so gallantly and crossed Ez Zouai feature to thicken the line on the southern side. Nevertheless as evening approached the 2nd Gurkhas remained in a far from enviable position, and it was with some relief that at 4 p.m. artillery land lines arrived at Battalion Headquarters. The unlucky destruction of artillery wireless sets at the 7th Brigade Headquarters had interrupted communications, and the divisional guns, which had begun to move forward into previously reconnoitred positions before dawn, had waited impatiently all day for news of targets. (By 8.30 a.m. that morning all the divisional and supporting artillery, moving across the open ridges to forward positions in full view of the enemy, were ready for the call as soon as communications could be restored.)

At 4.10 p.m. the artillery intervened. A curtain of fire crashed down on the western end of El Alig. When the smoke cleared away, nothing could be seen of the enemy groups which had been working forward along this spur. With the strong arm of the artillery protecting them the Gurkha companies settled down to deal with the obstinate enemy.

In the meantime enemy artillery fire was likewise increasing in volume, and shots fell with particular



General Montgomery congratulates Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa on his exploits which won him the Victoria Cross

intensity along the northern escarpment of Rass ez Zouai and on the tracks which led through the hills behind the thousand yards of anti-tank ditch which had been abandoned by the enemy. The crossing begun by the Essex was completed, and that afternoon the Indian Sappers and Miners came forward to broaden the bridge and to construct a second crossing. It was an arduous and extremely dangerous operation, and Colonel Blundell took personal charge. He was accompanied by Major Murray, commanding the 4th Field Company, Captain Baldwin of the same company, and Lieutenant Allan, a Liaison Officer of the American Army, who as a former engineer of the Cyprus Mining Corporation, had met the 4th Division in Cyprus and was now delighted to be attached to them. Under heavy harassing fire, Colonel Blundell drove the work forward. A shell burst on the four supervising officers as they stood in conference and all were killed. It was a sad day for the Indian Sappers and Miners and for the 4th Indian Division.

Late that afternoon, a young German officer wearing the Iron Cross suddenly appeared out of nowhere on a commanding position on the northern edge of the Rass ez Zouai escarpment. He headed a gun team which had climbed an almost sheer cliff without being spotted. If he could have brought his gun into action and established himself, "B" Company would have been in grave difficulties. A section of 2nd Gurkhas, however, immediately closed and drove back the gun team, killing the officer. As night fell attempts to filter on to the crests increased and all evening bushwhacking between the scattered Gurkhas and the persistent climbers continued. Shortly after midnight forward patrols reported the enemy to be mustering in some strength against the northern face of El Alig. At 1 a.m. four field regiments and one medium regiment crashed down in concentration on this area. The valley between El Alig and Fatnassa was

swept of every living man and such parties of the enemy as had gained the crest were cut off. They advanced bravely, and the Gurkhas, holding their fire until the attackers were silhouetted against the skyline, shot them down to the last man.

For the remainder of the night smaller groups endeavoured to work their way up from the valley through which the military road ran, and on two occasions defensive fire swept down. But as night wore away silence settled over the Fatnassa. The end had come at Wadi Akarit. When light broke on the morning of April 7, the Gurkhas walked openly along the crests or toiled up with heavy loads on their head straps. Across the valley the Punjabis were singing. Clouds of dust far across the flowering plains showed the enemy to be in full retreat. The road to Gafsa was open. A patrol of Gurkhas, pushing down the military road, met a jeep loaded with American scouts. They shook hands, exchanged cigarettes, and grinned at each other. The Eighth Army was now part of a continuous Allied front.

On the ravine through which the military road ran, an Italian battalion had jettisoned its equipment, including a box of regimental silver which a lance-naik had the luck to discover. Under the northern slopes of Fatnassa a field dressing station had stood. It was now gone, but its dead lay neatly swathed in blankets, waiting for the victor to bury them. The rich Tunisian plains, stretching for hundred and fifty miles, were warm with a riot of spring flowers. A divisional botanist identified twenty-four varieties in one escarpment.

Across this smiling land the long convoys felt their way into the north. Sfax with its battered waterfront was by-passed. Djem with the ruins of the great Roman amphitheatre; Sousse and cheering crowds making the victory sign, a dozen neat villages set in olive groves, these passed in review as the

Indian Division pushed up the roads until the long swinging ramparts of the mountains reappeared. The pleasant little village of Enfidaville lay in the warm sunlight at the entrance to the narrow coastal plain. Behind it, among the olive groves and the poppy and buttercup bestrewn pastures, the 4th Indian Division came to rest and began to prepare for their next task.

NINETEEN

Mountain Battle

IN the long ride northward through the glowing Tunisian countryside many officers and men said to each other that the years of vicissitude were over. The Eighth Army was "clicking" at last. There was a sense of power, of timing, of intimate comprehension of battle needs, which denoted the rhythm and assurance of a great machine. Yet the thoughts of many turned to the past three years when gallant comrades and fine leaders had paid the price of an Empire's unreadiness; many remembered the dead men strewn over three thousand miles, whose bodies as in Kipling's fine line:

"Were all our defence, while we wrought our defences."

Happy indeed is the general who comes to a late command in any British war. He has missed the pathetic improvisations, the desperate makeshifts, with which those who have served before him have had to fight. He does not know the shortages which lost battles or in spite of which battles were won, for he has plenty and the best of weapons. Training is no longer a matter of the text book, but of the job in hand. He will find experienced brains to plan his operations and to lead his attacks. Moreover, the

soldier, toughened by years of adversity, has learned how to save his skin and how to slay his enemy. His experiences when fighting against odds have made him into a magnificent fighting man dour in defence, indomitable in attack.

Nevertheless, as the Eighth Army closed up on the fortress of Tunis its commander had his problems. One was shortage of infantry fit for battle. Of the eight Infantry Divisions arrayed at Alamein, the Australians, the South Africans and the 161st Brigade of the 4th Indian Division were not available. The 50th Northumbrian Division had been so roughly handled at Mareth and Akarit that reorganisation was necessary. As for those great fighting men who had harried the Boche for fifteen hundred miles, the New Zealanders and the Highlanders, the Scotsmen were so reduced in strength that they could only be used in defensive roles, and the New Zealanders, mighty men though they were, were urgently in need of rest.

This left the two Indian Brigades, the 201st Guards Brigade, and another British Division (a late arrival) as the main striking force in the last battle for Tunis. There were, of course, elements of three Armoured Divisions with their lorry-borne infantry available, but under the shadow of high mountains the role of armour was certain to be restricted. The forces at General Montgomery's disposal, therefore, for the final assault were comparatively limited, and with the coastal plain narrowing to a few miles in width, and with a solid mass of mountain peaks dominating it for thirty miles to Bou Ficha, the problem of reaching Tunis by way of the coast gave much cause for thought as the men of the Indian and New Zealand Divisions took up positions for attack to the north of Enfidaville.

Moreover, a little of the old bad infection of unwarranted optimism had crept in. The first intelligence summary suggested that this front was lightly

held, and consequently offered an easy task. The Axis strength was assessed at six battalions holding the coastal plain and the mountain ranges along the Enfidaville-Pont du Fahs road. This area must be seized before any advance along the coastal plain was possible. It consisted of a mountain block of approximately one hundred square miles firmly set into the main Tunisian massif. It was approached by a series of rolling hills now clad in spring crops, studded with small white farm-houses around which ran zarebas of cactus hedge. Deep wadis cut through the valley bottoms. On the left of the positions the high buttresses of Fadeloun intruded into the plain. This feature was firmly held by General Le Clerc's colonial Frenchmen from Lake Chad, under 4th Divisional Command. Passing along the northern glacis of Fadeloun, beyond the crest of the last ridge, a broad valley opened, through which the wadi El Boul cut a deep channel. To the north of the river bed the ground sloped slowly upwards for a mile before springing into the great dome of Garci.

Along the southern slopes of Garci a metalled road wandered northwards into Tacruna, a high castellated buttress like a city of Lyonesse, set in the plain four miles west of Enfidaville. Tacruna covered the eastern approaches of Garci, where a small re-entrant plain led up to Bleida knoll, the first high feature. It was apparent, therefore, that Tacruna and Bleida must be taken and preparations were made for an immediate attack.

This was bound to be a tremendous operation. It was possible that it would mean the storming of twenty miles of mountains, range by range, if enemy resistance did not crack at the first shock. Now, first patrol contacts with the enemy did not bear out the original estimate of his strength. (No less than twenty-three battalions, including many German, were identified on the Garci-Tacruna front.



Sharpening kukris.

A few days later a corps officer informed war correspondents that this sector was the most strongly held in Tunisia, with a density of one thousand enemies to the mile.) But the job had to be done, and neither the Kiwis nor the Red Eagles were the men to flinch from its rigour. On the night of April 19/20, the 5th Brigade moved out from its encampment among the rolling ridges, crossed the wadi Boul, and at 9 p.m. began their infiltration up the rising ground on the right flank of Garci. "D" Company of the Essex Regiment led under Captain J. Watts, and they moved through the darkness on Bleida knoll and the small village of Raaman on its slopes. The mosque at the foot of the village was a distinguishing landmark. Bleida stood like a footstool at the foot of Garci, and it must be cleared before the main attack went in.

Simultaneously with the advance on Bleida, a mile or two to the south on the other side of Garci, an Essex patrol of twelve men under Lieutenant Hailes committed itself to a most audacious enterprise. This small party undertook to pass through the enemy's lines for six miles, in order to mine the Pont du Fahs road in the valley behind the Garci group of mountains. The story of this patrol, which encountered bitter opposition from the first penetration into enemy territory, yet fought its way forward all night through a ring of enemies, lay doggo the next day and fought its way out on the following night with a heavy bag of enemy killed, has been told extensively in the Press and over the radio. No Buchan thriller could compete with the experiences of Lieutenant Hailes' men, as they stood facing silent enemies in the darkness a few yards away and waited for them to close; as they looked back to see lines of beaters following them from crest to crest; as they charged haystacks with the bayonet, thinking them to be gun positions; and finally when Lieutenant Hailes believed himself to be mortally wounded, receiving his orders which took

them over the last miles to safety. Some weeks afterwards the good news came through that this indomitable officer had not died, but was a prisoner in enemy hands. Since then he has been released.

Captain Watts found the village Raaman to be deserted. But on emerging beyond it, on their way up the slopes, his company came under heavy machine-gun fire from higher ground. Swinging his men to flank, Captain Watts stalked the post single-handed. Walking into it from the rear he took fourteen men by surprise and captured them. The flank platoon also mopped up one or two posts, and the company resumed its ascent. By this time the battle was in full swing. Another of Captain Watts' platoons encountered a deep gully across its front. A Bren-gunner plunged into it and after an exchange of fire at close range, brought out a number of prisoners. A further infiltration brought "D" Company to their final objective well within their time. The platoons strung out along the knoll and began to consolidate. In all about fifty prisoners had been picked up, including a few Germans, with only a handful of casualties. The Essex had provided a neat and workmanlike opening for the Garci attack.

The Storming of Garci

With Bleida secured the Rajputana Rifles at 10 p.m. moved forward to storm the main crests of Garci. The leading companies pushed straight up the mountain under a hail of mortar and machine-gun fire. "A" Company was pinned down but "B" Company swung to flank and carried a line of machine-gun posts with the bayonet, releasing "A" Company and allowing them to close with further enemy outposts, whose garrison they destroyed with cold steel. The fighting grew incredibly bitter; in the darkness men grappled and slew each other, the survivors went to earth as bombs burst about them,

rose and rushed forward in the dust and smoke, and fastened upon other enemies. For four hours the Rajputana Rifles battled their way forward in one of the bloodiest encounters of the war. Every gain drew a counter-attack from desperate men pledged to hold the heights at all costs. Yard by yard the Raj Rif worked upwards, around rocky knolls, across mountain wadis, surging over crests to face other crests from which mortar and small arms fire swept down incessantly upon them.

On the approach to the battalion's second objective an enemy machine-gun post pinned down the advance. Company Havildar Major Chhelu Ram, of "B" Company, armed with a Tommy-gun sprang forward into the midst of the spurting flames, reached the sangar and shot four gunners dead. At the next objective Lieutenant Yates, leading "B" Company, fell mortally wounded. The gallant havildar major immediately rushed into the open to assist him. He himself was hit, but ignoring his wounds he took command of his own company as well as the leading elements of "A" Company, whose commander, Captain Ffrench, had likewise been shot down. But the advance had been brought to a halt, and Havildar Major Chhelu Ram, working like a Trojan and disdainful of safety, began to organise the position in preparation for the next advance.

In the valley below Garci the 9th Gurkhas impatiently waited for their turn. They were assembled in a particularly unpleasant spot with shells and mortar bombs dropping among them. At 3 a.m. Colonel Roche received permission from Brigadier Donald Bateman to anticipate events, and to pass through "D" Company of the Essex in order to attack Point 330, the highest feature on the approaches to Garci. Up the hills the Gurkhas dashed in the face of heavy machine-gun fire. They came upon a line of

sangars spitting flame. The *kukris* whirled and the garrisons were cut down to a man. A sudden rush out of the darkness overwhelmed the leading platoons, but the jemadar and his men emerged from the melee with bloody knives and German dead strewn about them. The line held, and "A" Company, swinging around the slopes of Point 330, swept the enemy from the lower knolls in the same fashion. Twice the obstinate Germans came plunging back through the darkness to the close. Both company commanders were down, but Subedar Bimbahadar Sen and Havildar Major Dhirbahadur Adhikari took charge and swept upwards to the next enemy stronghold. As the cat-footed hillmen swarmed out of the darkness with *kukris* flickering, the enemy fled howling. Point 330 was in our hands.

As the tide of battle ebbed from the Gurkhas, it swept again on to the Rajputana Rifles, clinging like limpets to their hardly won ground on the rocky crests of Garci. At 4 a.m., a strong counter-attack swept down upon them. Ammunition ran low, but the indomitable Rajputana Rifles fixed bayonets and waited for the close. As their enemies loomed in the darkness, the *jawans* met them with a shower of stones, and leaped in with the steel. High along the wavering line of hand-to-hand encounters, the voice of Havildar Major Chhelu Ram rang above the rattle of fire, the crash of bombs, the shouts and the screams. Rushing from point to point, he rallied his men over and over again, shouting "Jats and Mohammedans—no withdrawal. Forward—forward." Under his inspired leadership, the Raj Rif drew together and flung themselves forward with butt and bayonet. The counter-attack wavered and broke, followed by a last shower of stones. But among the many on the ground was the great-hearted havildar major, this time stricken mortally. Until he died a few minutes later, he continued to command and exhort his men. The second Jat to win the Victoria Cross for the Rajputana Rifles in this war, Havildar



On Garri.

Major Chhelu Ram's memory will remain green for ever among the men who followed him, and who held this vital ground under his dauntless command.

Second only to the epic feat of Havildar Major Chhelu Ram was the individual reconnaissance of Jemadar Dwansing Basnet of the 9th Gurkhas. Fortunately the jemadar lived to tell his tale. Taking advantage of a lull, he was exploring in the darkness in front of his platoon, when he was challenged, as he quaintly says, "in a foreign language. I felt it was not the British language or I would have recognised it. To make quite sure I crept up and found myself looking into the face of a German. I recognised him by his helmet. He was fumbling with his weapon, so I cut off his head with my *kukri*. Another appeared from a slit trench, and I cut him down also. I was able to do the same to two others, but one made a great deal of noise, which raised the alarm. I had a cut at a fifth, but I am afraid I only wounded him. Yet perhaps the wound was severe, for I struck him between the neck and the shoulders.

"I was now involved in a struggle with a number of Germans, and eventually after my hands had become cut and slippery with blood, they managed to wrest my *kukri* from me. One German beat me over the head with it, inflicting a number of wounds. He was not very skilful, however, sometimes striking me with the sharp edge but oftener with the blunt.

"They managed to beat me to the ground where I lay pretending to be dead. The Germans got back into their trenches and after a while I looked up. I could not see anything for my eyes were full of blood. I wiped the blood out of my eyes, and quite near I saw a German machine-gun. I thought, 'if only I can reach that gun I shall be able to kill the lot.' By now it was getting light and as I lay thinking of a plan to reach the gun my platoon advanced and started to

hurl grenades among the enemy. But they were also falling very near me, so I thought that if I did not move I really should be dead. I managed to get to my feet, and ran towards my platoon. Not recognising me I heard some of my men call, 'Here comes the enemy. Shoot him.' I bade them not to do so. They recognised my voice and let me come in.

"My hands being cut about and bloody, and having lost my *kukri*, I had to ask one of my platoon to take my pistol out of my holster and to put it in my hand. I then took command of my platoon again."

The jemadar ends on a note of complaint concerning the unreasonableness of sahibs.

"I met my company commander who bade me go to the Regimental Aid Post. I said, 'Sahib, there is fighting to be done, and I know the enemy's dispositions. I must stay and command my platoon.' But he firmly ordered me, and I had to go. Yet before I went, one of my Bren-gunners was hit, and my company commander, although wounded in the neck, took over the Bren-gun and continued to fire it. Moreover, the doctor sahib, having bandaged me, refused to allow me to return to my platoon." Which was not to be wondered at, as he had a dozen wounds on his head alone.

Dawn broke with the 9th Gurkhas again under pressure. A terrific mortar barrage cloaked Point 330 in smoke. The Germans mustered for their rush. The sight of enemies was joy to the Gurkhas and reaching for their *kukris*, they plunged out of their positions straight upon the enemy. Five minutes later, forty-four German dead were strewn on the ground. Only those who fled lived. The right forward platoon of "D" Company found themselves under fire from higher ground, and promptly attacked. They were unable to make the top of the feature, but established themselves half-way up, whence all efforts to dislodge them failed.

When Colonel Roche reached the forward positions, he found his men organised and confident. A jemadar said, "Sahib, we have driven them back. Now nothing will budge us."

When the counter-attack swept down on the Rajputana Rifles, Colonel Noble of the Essex was well satisfied with his position on Bleida hill. He felt he could spare part of his battalion to help the Raj Rif and Gurkhas in their Homeric struggle higher up the mountains. Soon after dawn, therefore, "B" Company of the Essex was ordered to secure a high feature in front of the Gurkhas and the Rajputana Rifles. Thereafter "A" Company was to pass through to a further objective. At 8.45 a.m., "B" Company advanced round the western end of El Bleida, and came under heavy fire from above. Nevertheless, the home countymen pushed on, and by 10.30 a.m. were firmly established on the preliminary objectives. Preparations went forward for "A" Company to pass through that afternoon, but before the attack could go in, the enemy struck back and dislodged "B" Company from their positions.

Later in the day it was decided that the opposition was so intense that consolidation must be made before further advances could be risked. All afternoon, therefore, under continuous sweeps of artillery and multiple mortar fire, the Essex, the Rajputana Rifles and the 9th Gurkhas endeavoured to prepare a defensive position among the bare rocks. Indeed, the footing was so precarious, and defensive facilities so limited, that Brigadier Bateman felt he must bring forward his last reserves. Soon after midday, the 16th Punjabis, who had been borrowed from the 7th Brigade, came forward to climb the mountain, and to take up a position on the right of the 9th Gurkhas in front of a feature which dominated the position. The Punjabis advanced in extended formation to cross the open

ground and the wadi Boule. A spectator on Garci thus described the incident: "The 16th Punjab Regiment advanced across the plain in perfect open formation. The Punjabis might have been on a battle-drill parade, and we waited breathlessly for the enemy defensive fire to fall among them. It soon came and they were enveloped in thick dust and smoke. But when this cleared away, there was the battalion still steadily advancing in the same perfect formation."

The Artillery Takes a Hand

Four of the six infantry battalions of the Division, therefore, were now committed to this death-struggle on the crest of Garci. Of the other two battalions, the Royal Sussex had passed under command of the 23rd Armoured Brigade, and three companies had moved forward into the re-entrant plain below Bleida feature, together with the 2nd Gurkhas, who were in touch with the New Zealanders on the right. This continuous line prevented any attempt of the enemy to come to the aid of his Garci forces from the Enfidaville flank.

Thus began the ordeal of Garci. Throughout April 20/21/22 there was scarcely an hour when furious outbursts of shell and mortar fire did not herald a fresh attempt to win back these heights. The thinning lines of 9th Gurkhas, Raj Rif, Essex and 16th Punjabis, with little shelter, short supplies, and no prospects of reinforcements, gave no ground whatsoever, and dauntlessly met blow with blow. Yet whatever the courage and discipline of these great fighting men standing alone on a naked mountain, they could never have held their ground without the continuous support of that arm which had played such a vital part throughout all the North African campaign—the Royal Regiment of Artillery.

For this action the three Divisional Regiments were reinforced by four other field regiments, three

medium regiments, and one troop of the newly arrived 17-pounder anti-tank guns. In all, this gave Brigadier Dimoline no less than ten regiments (222 guns) of field and medium artillery; and by calling upon flanking divisions to assist under the very efficient fire control system which had been evolved since Alamein, thirteen regiments (294 guns) were available for emergencies. Scattered back among grain fields, in the valleys between the rolling ridges, this powerful force awaited for the hour when they could intervene with devastating power on behalf of the sorely tried infantry. The latest theories of artillery support maintained that a thin barrage was useless, and that shell fire dribbled over an area was a waste of time and money. To be effective, a barrage must be so tight that a shell would fall in every ten yards of target. But no barrage could match the deadliness of concentration shoots in which a staggering weight of shell was cast upon a comparatively small area. Such targets if pinpointed and given code names could be brought under an inferno of fire which must destroy all resistance. The divisional and supporting artillery could pitch high explosive at the rate of more than eight tons in every sixty seconds, and could switch from one target to another in five minutes or less. Such uncannily complete support for the infantry had involved months of patient planning and training, and it likewise required artillery officers to go forward to the most exposed positions, and with the greatest daring select targets and report upon them. So when the great test came at Garci, the artillery took over the battle in such manner that not only did the infantry never lose an inch of ground, but the enemy were so dazed and shocked by their ordeal, that in the end they had no fight left in them.

On April 20 the artillery intervened in the Garci battle on eleven occasions; on April 21 on eighteen occasions; and on the final day, on nine occasions.

During this period, the divisional and affiliated regiments averaged three hundred and sixty-six rounds per gun. The log of the C.R.A. Headquarters from 2.20 p.m. to 3.20 p.m. on April 21, records in detail a characteristic hour at the height of the battle.

"At 2.20 p.m. one of the three telephones in the office rang. The F.O.O. (Forward Observation Officer), 1st Field Regiment, on Garci reported enemy were forming up for counter-attack and called for defensive fire on ROSE. The 1st Field Regiment and its two affiliated field regiments were told to engage, whilst simultaneously on the other telephone, a call was put through to all other regiments to put them on ROSE as well. Simultaneously C.A.G.R.A. (Corps Artillery Group R.A.) was rung up, told of impending counter-attack and told that we would like all three medium regiments made available.

"Telephone rang again—D.F. wanted urgently on LUPIN, F.O.O. reports enemy seen running along crest throwing stick grenades. Three medium regiments put straight on to LUPIN, 'clear the line' multiple call to all field regiments to engage. Two minutes later, both telephones rang 'D.F. urgently on CROSSLEY,' 'D.F. urgently on HISPANO.' Now it had to be decided which was the more important. The medium regiments were left banging away on LUPIN, and three field regiments were swung on to CROSSLEY, and four field regiments on HISPANO.

"G.S.O.I. direct line calls and asks how it's going, and is told what we know. He has a copy of our D.F. trace, so can follow the direction of the counter-attack from the sequence in which D.F. is called for and fired. Every time we fire, he is notified on his direct line.

"C.C.R.A. (Corps Commander Royal Artillery), 10th Corps, rings up to know what it's all about and if we need any assistance. He is told all we know, and

that we have the medium regiments banging away for us and that is all the additional support we need at the moment.

"Information comes down from mountain that the enemy counter-attacks seem heavy, but that our fire is falling right amongst them, and that our infantry have not given an inch of ground.

"The telephones were all ringing constantly, F.O.O.'s calling for fire the whole time, now on this target, now on that. CHEVROLET came next, then CHRYSLER, then CHRYSLER again, then AUSTIN. All in rapid succession. Just as orders to all regiments had gone through to fire on one target, call for fire on another came through. Sometimes it took its turn and then had the full weight of seven field and three medium regiments, sometimes two or three regiments switched on to it instantly and the remainder came in later.

"F.O.O. reported that enemy infantry had got to within three hundred yards of him, when the full weight of the Divisional Artillery came down on the D.F. he had called for, and fell slap amongst them, and that when the smoke and dust had cleared away, nothing was seen of them afterwards. This was encouraging, and we hoped that the Boche was getting a really bloody nose everywhere.

"At 3.10 p.m., AUSTIN called for again. This time, for once, it was the only call at the time, and it had ten regiments on to it. Then at 3.15 p.m., a new one, AVRO on the right flank popped up, and it too had the benefit of ten regiments, which was repeated five minutes later.

"At 3.20 p.m., there was an unaccountable hush. No telephone bell rang. It seemed quite uncanny after the last hour, when the three telephones had seemed to be vying with each other as to how many times they could ring.

“To break the lull, we rang up 1st Field Regiment, who had had news from its Observation Posts that the enemy counter-attacks, which had come in a very determined manner from two directions, had been broken up, that our infantry were still secure in their positions and that for the moment all was quiet.”

What was it like at the other end? One enemy counter-attack opened with a terrific blitz, lasting for half an hour. It was certainly the heaviest bombardment the Division had ever experienced, and it was intended to wipe out these battalions or destroy their morale. It did neither. As the smoke and dust cleared away, heads could be seen popping up from holes and behind rocks, while section and platoon commanders could be heard preparing their men to receive the infantry attack.

It was clear that the attack would fall mainly on a company of the 9th Gurkhas, so off went a company of the Punjabis to help them, through the hell of bursting shells and mortar bombs. But the attack never reached the line. The terrific defensive fire fell right among the enemy troops, blasting them to little bits, and the infantry helped with small arms fire. This attack had failed.

In their battle to the north, the New Zealanders had found Taurua a tough nut to crack. Only the amazing gallantry of a handful of Maoris enabled this commanding bastion in the coastal plain to be stormed and held. Casualties were heavy, and General Tuker and General Freyberg, after the first day of savage fighting, were faced with the same question. Had they the man-power to push on? Twenty-five per cent. of each battalion's strength had to be used for carrying ammunition and supplies to the forward troops, with a consequent reduction in rifle strength. With almost inaccessible mountains beyond, the answer had to be in the negative. This left only two

alternatives—to hold the present gains and destroy as many of the enemy as possible, or to withdraw and to seek some more accessible front. Under the fearful hammering of the British guns, the enemy was losing heavily, but he continued to bar the road to Tunis. The High Command therefore decided to pin him down among the hills, and to revert to a plan, similar to the original Akarit plan, of seizing high ground along the coastal plain with infantry, in order to cover the passage of tanks along the shore.

On the night of April 22/23, therefore, the 5th Brigade was relieved on Garci by the 51st Highland Division, and moved over towards the sea behind Enfidaville. Their new task called for them to seize Tebaga, a long razor back ridge running almost due east and west, some five miles north-west of Enfidaville. This ridge masked the remainder of the Tunisian massif, and if securely held, would allow the armour a certain narrow space for deployment for the final crash through into the favourable tank runs of the Cap Bon peninsula.

In many ways it was a desperate undertaking. Even if Tebaga were held, the plain could be raked by fire from the mountains behind and on either side. Furthermore, there was reason to believe that the main coastal defences against tanks were well to the north, and that a limited gain would be all that the seizure of Tebaga feature could offer. It was likewise discovered that the assembly area for attack on Tebaga was dominated by Point 130, to the north-west of Enfidaville, and that this point was strongly held by the enemy. It therefore became necessary to stage a supplementary attack on this feature. Another Division had now come up, and one Brigade was placed under 4th Divisional Command for the attack on Point 130. This attack went in on the night of April 28/29, and was at first successful. But on April 29 the enemy

counter-attacked heavily and drove in the holding Brigade. There was considerable confusion, and the Germans, ever alert to seize an opportunity, pushed down to within two thousand yards of the first wave of Divisional artillery, arrayed for concentration on Tebaga.

The 7th Brigade was encamped in the olive groves to the north of Enfidaville, where it had been catching a certain amount of the enemy's counter-battery fire. All the officers and V.C.Os. of the 2nd Gurkha Rifles, except Captain M. A. Ormsby, were absent on conference and the 16th Punjabis were busy with their plans for the night attack. But these men were veterans, and old soldiers are practised in surprise. Sections led by riflemen and sepoy's, platoons and companies led by N.C.O.'s emerged from the olive groves at the double, driving straight on the enemy. When they found him, they held him, and a nasty situation was averted.

In the opinion of the old hands, the fight on Garci had been the stickiest affair in two and a half years of savage fighting, not even excepting Keren. The casualties had been heavy, including both Brigadiers, but these veterans knew how to keep alive and yet win the day. As the recommendations for immediate awards for gallantry came in, it was seen how many of the battalions spoke highly of their Indian and British doctors and stretcher-bearers in this terrible battle. The doctors had established their posts just on the reverse slope of the crest, particularly favourite targets for the mortars. As one recommendation put it, "the courage of the doctor and the confidence reposed in him by the sepoy's, went far to maintain morale at the highest pitch." In all branches of the service, the fight on Garci was the peak effort of the 4th Indian Division.



Bringing a wounded man down from Garci.

TWENTY

The Final Victory

IT was now realised that a major and expensive operation had been embarked upon. Doubts began to grow in high places. On April 30—a dramatic day—General Tucker and his principal officers left on an all-day reconnaissance. Unknown to him the problem of the Enfidaville coastal corridor had been receiving attention at African Force Headquarters, and that morning the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Harold Alexander, had flown to Eighth Army Headquarters. Decisions were quickly taken. At 11 a.m. signals flashed. The 4th Indian Division, the 7th Armoured Division and the 201st Guards Brigade would leave the army which had been built about them, and would take the roads to central Tunisia for the final stroke of the North African campaign.

Four hours after receiving his message, the 4th Indian Division was on the line of march. It is eloquent of the degree of organisation that the Eighth Army achieved that Divisions numbering many thousand men, and thousands of vehicles, could at four hours' notice leave for another part of Africa, two hundred miles away, without confusion or delay. It is seldom in this story that the opportunity has offered to pay a tribute to the hard-working transport companies which

have borne the fighting men from one end of Africa to another. When it is remembered that tyres do not grow on camel thorn, and that no springs nor half-shafts have been made which will endure desert potholes and boulders indefinitely, it is realised what a splendid task has been performed unobtrusively by the recovery sections, the various line workshops, and the many other services manned by the officers and men of the I.E.M.E. and R.E.M.E. On this occasion as always, the transport services did not fail. Taking station along the two hundred miles of unknown mountain road, they nursed the long convoys through, and theirs was no small contribution to the victory to come.

When night fell on April 30, a steady stream of Divisional vehicles was passing through the holy city of Kairouan, and were taking the long southern route to Sbeitla, where the ruins of the old Roman cities still stand. Headlights were allowed, but after years of blackout not one vehicle in a hundred had bulbs. Driving steadily through the night at a regulated pace, they passed Sheiba and came into the fertile valleys of central Tunisia, with trim tidy crops mounting to the hill crests, neat villages reminiscent of the Midi, girt about with almond and fruit orchards or with rich pasture land in which contented sheep continued to graze as the unending convoys passed them.

After a short halt for a "brew-up" at dawn, the traffic flowed on, quickening to day pace. The Division was now in a new country, filled with civilians who stood along the road, thrusting up their finger in the "V" sign, while children wearing berets raced beside the trucks shouting in voluble French to the uncomprehending *jawans*, who twirled their moustaches and examined the cattle and sheep in pasture with deep interest. Then scuttle-helmeted Americans began



The work of the I.E.M.E

to line the roads, the bearded Sikhs in their pugrees, the Rajputs, Jats, Punjabi Mussalmans, and squat little Gurkhas were something new to them. The Americans gave the "thumbs up" sign, and friendly jests crackled as the lorries lumbered past. So throughout the day, up the long valley from Le Kef to Le Krib, through the Provencal town of TebourSouk on its hillside, and past the great monastery of the white fathers at Thibar, the 4th Division drew nearer to the bastion which the enemy defended so desperately in the fortress of Tunisia—the Medjez el Bab gateway into the open plains of Tunis.

Here the British First Army was met. The contrast was extreme. With their new vehicles, camouflaged in dark colours to blend with the trees and fields, this other army might have belonged to another nation. Into this ordered scene swept the battered old trucks of the Eighth Army, painted a light sandy grey, with never a windscreen, rarely a hood and mudguards tied on with bits of wire; scratched rusty veterans of an advance of two thousand miles.

The battle had reached its last stage, and the enemy's line, distended by terrific hammering, was almost ready to break. But along the left of the Medjez el Bab—Tunis road, a group of features still supplied him with sufficient cover to organise an effective defence, and to deny the gateway to the British tanks. On the left front the 1st British Division was involved in savage fighting among the broken ground of the Boo Huaker. On its right, the 4th British Division faced the village of Montuarnaud, whose distillery was a landmark. Between these two objectives a small valley lay, with rugged foothills running to the north-east. The plan of battle called for the 4th Indian Division to crash through between the two British Divisions, and to reach the open plain some four miles ahead. Six objectives were set down, two of which

were to be taken by the 5th Brigade, who then would be leap-frogged by the 7th Brigade. Thereafter an Army Tank Brigade, under command of the 4th Indian Division, would overrun the final objectives. Then the 7th British Armoured Division would pass through. Thus were the two Divisions, which had been in Africa since the beginning, selected to make the end.

The attack was set down for the morning of May 5, and days of busy planning followed the arrival of the reinforcements from the Eighth Army. The 4th Indian Division learned that its fame had preceded it, and that First Army commanders were anxious to know its views on hill fighting. General Tucker asked for a night attack instead of a dawn assault, and it was given him. After reports had been submitted on the terrific effects of artillery concentrations at Garci and Akarit, the number of rounds per gun was doubled. A token barrage and concentration shoots were substituted for a straight barrage programme.

The conference with the Armoured Brigade likewise produced an interesting exchange of views. Going over the map, the Tank Commander said to General Tucker: "I take it that we go in there." "No," said General Tucker, "that is where my infantry goes." "But naturally we go first," said the tank commander. "No," said General Tucker, "naturally we go first. You keep on stepping up in close support of the infantry. When we have opened the gate, you go through and keep on going. But you will wait for us to show that the way is clear." When the battle was over, the Tank Commander returned to thank the 4th Indian Division for its magnificent co-operation.

On the evening of May 5, the 1st British Division assaulted the Boo Huaker feature, stormed and held it. At 9 p.m. the 5th Brigade left their assembly area with the 9th Gurkhas leading, followed by the Rajputana Rifles and the Essex. Companies of the



Indian Sappers with mine-detecting apparatus rush forward to start work on an enemy minefield. Ahead of them a smokescreen is being laid for their protection.

Rajputana Rifles went forward with the Gurkhas. The 7th Brigade was to wait for the success signal of the 5th Brigade before going in. One regiment of Churchill tanks was attached to each Brigade, and Indian Sappers and Miners went forward. There was some possibility that enemy tanks might strike back in the low valley between Boo Huaker and the objectives of the Indian Division, so the Rajputana Rifles were given the task of laying an anti-tank screen across this front. Medium anti-tank guns, as well as infantry-manned 6-pounders stood by to advance to the support of the Raj Rif as soon as the 9th Gurkhas' attack went in. The 5th Brigade had under call no less than twenty squadrons of bombers and tank busters waiting to strike at dawn.

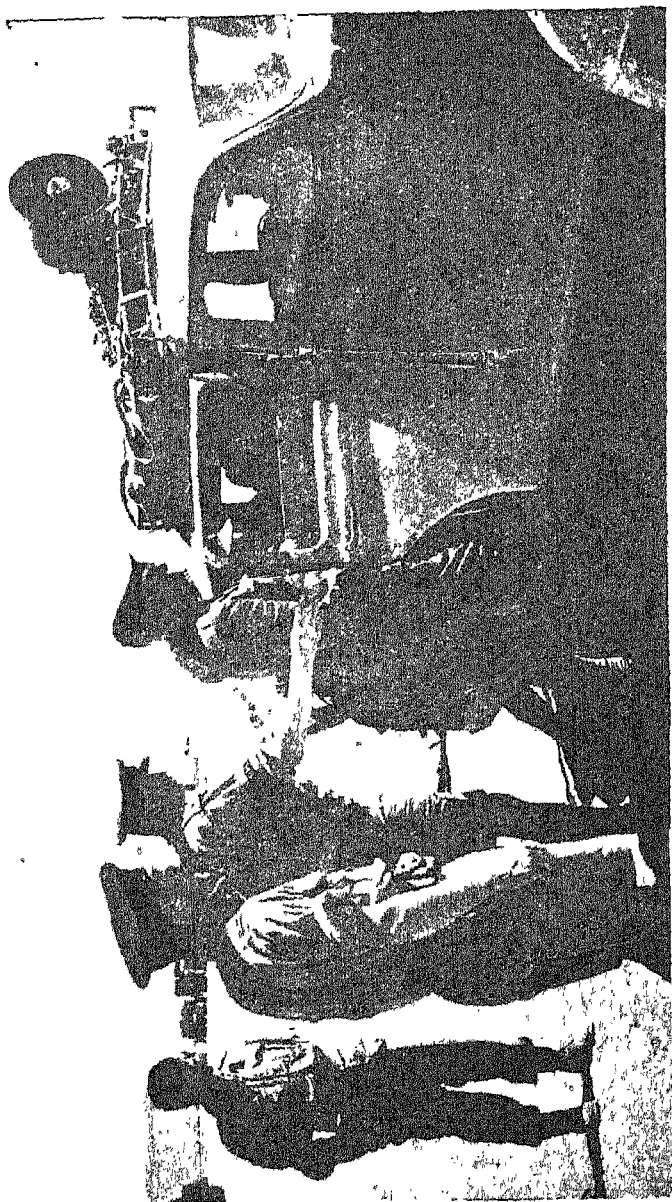
Along the narrow track with shaded lights the 9th Gurkhas plodded slowly towards their objective. A Bofors gun gave them alignment with groups of tracer shells at fixed periods. The Gurkhas came to cornfields, and wading through breast high, they closed up on Point 166, their first objective. Then six field regiments, one medium regiment and one heavy regiment crashed their concentrations on the dark hills ahead. Through the night smell of wild thyme came the acrid fumes of cordite, as the salvoes exploded into the grainfields. Enemy flares soared and his mortars laid down a stiff barrage, but it fell far behind the Gurkhas, now racing uphill onto Point 166. Tommy-guns chattered. The knives were out. The position was won.

As the success signal went up, the Rajputana Rifles moved like clockwork into their central position on the low ground below Point 166. The anti-tank guns came through, and the Bren carriers pushed forward on patrol. The Churchill tanks arrived with a roar, but as they appeared on the sky-line, they drew a deadly fusillade. The gate was not yet open, and

remembering General Tucker's admonition, the tanks waited hull down in safety. The Gurkhas were under way once more, sweeping forward towards their second objective at Point 154. Here resistance was crushed quickly. Tanks began to lurch down the valley. The enemy was keeping up a desperate mortar barrage which fell behind the advancing 5th Brigade. The Essex were up, and pushed through the Gurkhas. Their surge carried them over the main German positions, and bearing slightly right, they overran a multiple mortar detachment (Nebelwerfers) which was barraging the 4th British Division's front. This was the first capture of these devilish weapons, whose six barrels are fired electrically by remote control. The bombs, as they come over, make a noise like a gaggle of geese.

As dawn broke, the Air Force swung into action, with squadron after squadron of bombers and tank-busters—sometimes with fighters weaving overhead, sometimes skimming above the valley to smash at enemy targets from zero height. The concentration of air artillery was only less fearsome than the massed fire of hundreds of guns, and when the 7th Brigade passed through in the early forenoon, the enemy offered little opposition. Two objectives fell in quick succession to the 2nd Gurkhas, the Royal Sussex and the 16th Punjabis. Now the gate was indeed open, and all day long, tanks poured through on the straight road to Tunis. Tunis itself fell to two armoured car units which raced neck to neck for the honour. The enemy forces were cut in two, and the end of war in Africa had come.

Most of the Indians missed the mad joy which swept the streets of Tunis as the armour mopped up the last German defences there. But a few lucky detachments were able to tell their comrades of streets crowded with frantically cheering civilians, of girls



General Von Arnim goes into captivity.

swinging on board vehicles to kiss embarrassed drivers, of old Frenchmen bringing wine and food whenever vehicles halted. Liberty is a heady draught, and the memory of Tunis drunk with happiness will live with these Indian soldiers for the rest of their days.

But there was still work to do. In the hills to the south of Tunis and on the roads, to the Cap Bon peninsula, rearguards were still covering what might have been a line of retreat. The Armoured Divisions were working their way across to the coast at Hammanet, and the 4th Indian Division went with them to mop up in the hills north of Zaghuan. On the morning of May 11, with the Essex Regiment leading, the 5th Brigade started to beat the country along the Zaghuan track. With the enemy caught between the Indian Division and the Fighting French advancing from Pont du Fahs, a few sharp savage fights occurred. Then the enemy began to throw in his hand. Prisoners were picked up in hundreds everywhere. Working in columns among the hills, the 5th Brigade mopped up one unit after another, sometimes capturing stores intact, but more often finding vehicles and supplies already burning. It was obvious that the end was near.

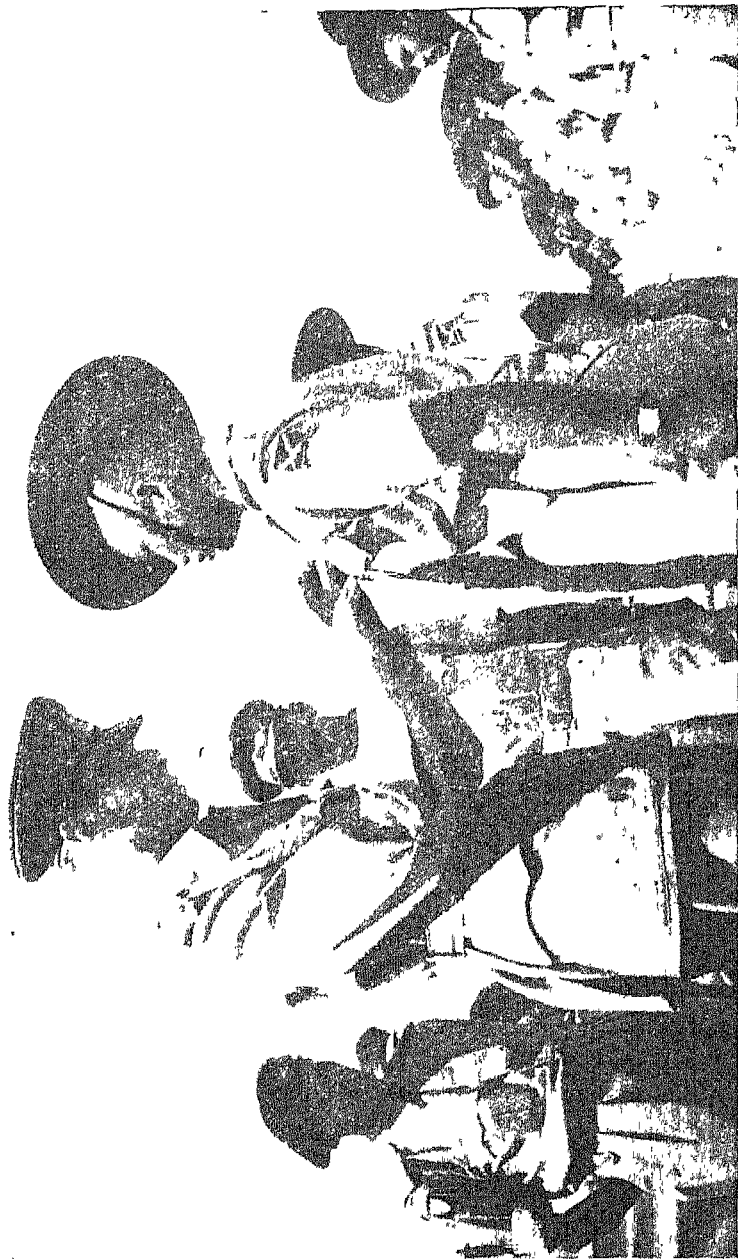
The 7th Brigade in the meantime had moved south-east on a parallel axis and were operating to the north of Ste. Marie du Zit, about twenty miles due west of Hammanet. At 2 p.m. on May 11, the Royal Sussex ran into an enemy detachment holding an organised position. They attacked with Bren carriers, swarmed over the position, and took one hundred and fifty prisoners. They were unable to advance, however, in face of artillery and mortar fire. During that night an officer of the Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 10th Panzer Division, came into the Royal Sussex lines seeking terms of surrender for his regiment. Colonel Glennie gave the German a rendezvous for the next

morning, and told him to bring his men in at 6.30 a.m. In the middle of the night, however, the 7th Brigade were ordered to take up new positions at both ends of a valley about ten miles long which was known to hold extensive enemy forces. Just before the Royal Sussex moved off, the Panzer Grenadiers came in, three thousand strong.

Later in the morning, the Royal Sussex pushed into the St. Marie du Zit area, taking more than five hundred prisoners. While these were being rounded up, a German staff car flying a white flag arrived. Colonel Nolte of General Von Arnim's staff stepped out. He was bearer of a personal letter from Von Arnim to the General Officer Commanding the Allied troops in the area. The Royal Sussex Commander (Major Bryant) passed the emissaries through to Division Headquarters near Ain el Asker.

But before the surrender could be formalised, the 2nd Gurkhas, who had been mopping up from the other end of the valley, had taken a hand in it.

That morning they had made contact with Frenchmen pushing north from Zaghouan. Colonel Showers, who led two companies on foot, had arrived at the bottom of the hill. While his men rested, he decided to climb to the top and see what was on the other side. His orderly, Rifleman Sarghana Limbu, accompanied him. From the crest of the hill he saw a German staff car and a German officer beside it waving a white flag. With Sarghana Limbu's Tommy-gun at the ready, Colonel Showers went down the hill, turned the corner, and found nearly a thousand Germans forming up on parade. They were dressed in smart uniforms, clean shaven and boots polished, all spick and span. Colonel Showers afterwards admitted that he felt rather embarrassed as he walked through the ranks towards an imposing caravan. A high staff officer approached him and said that Colonel Nolte had



His Majesty The King-Emperor decorates Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa, V.C.

already left to sue for terms of surrender. Colonel Showers, accompanied by a staff officer and a white-flag bearer, proceeded in the German staff car towards his Brigade Headquarters. On the way they met Colonel Glennie returning to place a guard over Von Arnim's Headquarters. General Alfrey, commanding the 5th Corps, and General Toker arrived soon after, and terms of capitulation were arranged.

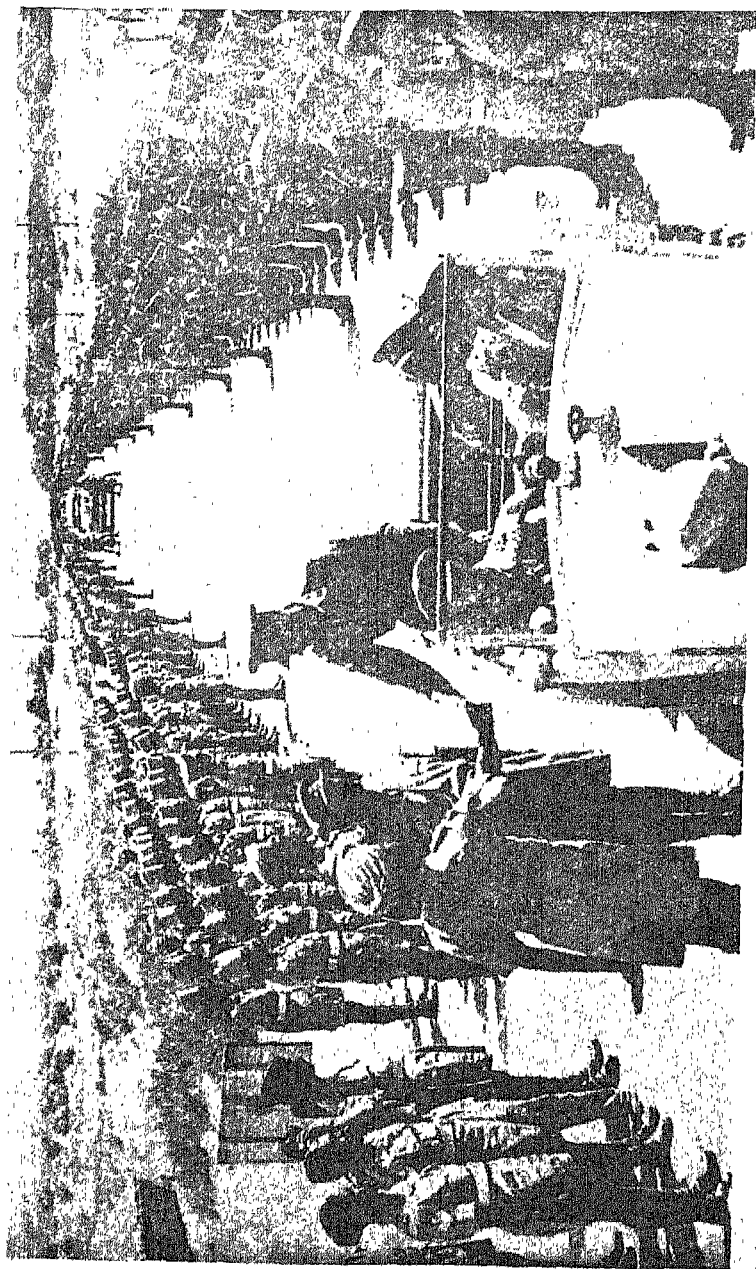
Late that afternoon, General Von Arnim, Commander of all the Axis forces in Africa, emerged from his caravan. His staff had lined up, and gave a punctilious display of Prussian military etiquette. Von Arnim then entered an open car and stood, Hitler fashion, acknowledging the salutes of his men, as he drove off with a Gurkha officer and a Royal Sussex guard. On his way he passed thousands of his own men also going into captivity. The 4th Division had no idea of how many it had captured. After reaching fifteen thousand the count was given up.

Thus the 4th Indian Division came to the end of the long road, which had led from the Western Desert to Eritrea, from Eritrea to Syria, back to the Western Desert and two thousand miles across Africa; while their fame grew from battle to battle until in their last campaign the world came to know them from the lips of the Prime Minister himself, in a glowing tribute to the only volunteer army in this world at war. But there is no officer nor man in the Red Eagle Division who does not regard the fame showered upon him as an equal tribute to other Indian Divisions, who bore the heat and burden of other days and for whom the God of Battles had decreed less fortune at the finish.

When, a few weeks later, the 4th Division lined the streets of Tripoli and His Majesty the King drove slowly through their ranks to pin the Victoria Cross on Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa, an accolade was as surely bestowed upon each of the Indian and British

soldiers, who are fighting or have fought shoulder to shoulder, the finest fighting combination in the world, in Paiforce, in Malaya, in East Africa, and above all in the steamy, malaria-infested jungles of the Indo-Burmese frontier.

THE END



His Majesty The King-Emperor inspects the 4th Indian Division in North Africa. The men in the conical pagarees are Madras Sappers and Miners.

APPENDIX

Awards

This list shows all awards made to the Indian Army during the war, with the exception of those shown in "The Tiger Strikes." Only those British Army units which formed part of the Indian formations in the Middle East are included. Those who were shown as Mentioned in Despatches in "The Tiger Strikes" are here denoted by an asterisk after their name; if twice mentioned, two asterisks are shown.

INDIAN ARMoured CORPS

SKINNER'S HORSE

(1st Duke of York's Own Cavalry)

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One M.C., one I.O.M. and six I.D.S.M.'s

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel I. F. Hossack (also mentioned).
M.C.	..	Lieutenant R. E. Coaker (also mentioned).
I.D.S.M.	..	5645 Lance-Daffadar Bhure Khan (also mentioned).
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel T. Scott. Captain H. T. Adams Williams. Risaldar Major Bannu Singh. Risaldar Mohammed Yunus Khan, I.O.M. 6263 Lance-Daffadar Abdul Hakim. 6547 Lance-Daffadar Munshi Khan. 6116 Lance-Daffadar Feroze Khan. 6946 Lance-Daffadar Ikram-ud-Din. 5575 Sowar Raj Singh, I.D.S.M.

2ND ROYAL LANCERS (GARDNER'S HORSE)

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One D.S.O.

M.C.	..	Captain A. H. McConnel. Captain D. McV. Reynolds. 2nd-Lieutenant J. E. Miller.
I.O.M.	..	11846 Lance-Daffadar Mehbub Ali Khan.
I.D.S.M.	..	Risaldar Lakhan Singh. 7075 Daffadar Risal Singh. 11831 Daffadar Ghulam Rabani.
Mention	..	Major J. B. Hobbs.

3RD CAVALRY

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One O.B.E. and one Mention.

Mention .. Major H. W. Picken, O.B.E.*

HODSON'S HORSE

(4th Duke of Cambridge's Own Lancers)

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One D.S.O. and one Mention.

C.B. .. Major-General F. W. Messervy, D.S.O.* (also mentioned).

M.C. .. Major M. R. Smeeton.

Mention .. Major W. J. Shoolbred.

PROBYN'S HORSE

(5th King Edward VII's Own Lancers)

Mentions .. Major J. E. Gordon (twice).
Major A. Goring.

7TH LIGHT CAVALRY

O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel J. N. Chauduri (also twice mentioned).

8TH KING GEORGE V'S OWN LIGHT CAVALRY

Mention .. Major J. M. W. Martin.

ROYAL DECCAN HORSE (9th Horse)

Mention .. Colonel R. N. Nunn, M.C.

THE GUIDES CAVALRY

(10th Queen Victoria's Own Frontier Force)

O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel E. K. Wood.

M.B.E. .. Captain D. J. Monteith.

I.D.S.M. .. 3860 Sowar Mohammed Afzal.

Mentions .. Major E. St. J. Birnie.
Risaldar Garka Ram.

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR'S OWN CAVALRY

(11th Frontier Force)

M.C. .. Major W. B. Prosser.

Captain A. A. J. Danvers.

2nd-Lieutenant R. A. I. Ball.



A Pathan.

I.D.S.M.	..	3364 Lance-Daffadar Chanan Singh. 3746 A/Lance-Daffadar Dalip Singh.
Mentions	..	Major G. T. Wheeler. Captain K. W. Bols.

13TH DUKE OF CONNAUGHT'S OWN LANCERS

C.B.	..	Lieut.-General W. G. H. Vickers (also mentioned).
O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel G. M. Dyer.
M.C.	..	Captain G. C. Garlick. Captain K. F. Robinson. Risaldar Prag Singh.
I.D.S.M.	...	Risaldar Sahar Khan. Risaldar Rafiq Khan. Risaldar Ranjit Singh. 1452 Daffadar Mohammed Bashir.
Mentions	..	Major H. D. Caldecott. Major J. D. de C. Guille. Major D. de la G. Mostert. Captain P. R. Mortimer. Risaldar Major Naranjan Singh, O.B.I. Risaldar Darbara Singh. Risaldar Nawab Khan.

15TH LANCERS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One Mention.

Mention	..	Major G. R. S. Webb, M.C.*
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THE POONA HORSE

(17th Queen Victoria's Own Cavalry)

O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel D. S. E. McNeill.
M.B.E.	..	Captain Sardar Makhan Singh.

18TH KING EDWARD VII'S OWN CAVALRY

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One D.S.O., one M.C., two I.O.M.'s, and six I.D.S.M.'s.

O.B.E.	..	Major L. M. Murphy.
M.C.	..	Captain J. W. Prentice. 2nd-Lieutenant G. Annesley Cooke (also mentioned).
I.D.S.M.	..	4860 Sowar Alim Khan.

Mentions .. Captain J. D. Girling.
 Risaldar Jag Ram
 Risaldar Jage Ram, I O.M.
 Risaldar Attar Singh.
 Jemadar Aman Singh, I O.M.
 5559 Sowar Balu Singh.

19TH KING GEORGE V'S OWN LANCERS

O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel W. G. M. Thompson (also mentioned)

CENTRAL INDIA HORSE

(21st King George V's Own Horse)

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One I.O.M., two I.D.S.M.'s, and five Mentions.

M.C. .. Captain D. H. G. M. Doyne Ditmas.
 I O.M. .. Risaldar Malik Mohammed Allahdad Khan.
 I.D.S.M. .. Risaldar Ali Musa Khan.
 Risaldar Sis Ram.
 Jemadar Mohammed Bahadur Khan.
 2794 Daffadar Janak Singh.
 5080 Lance-Daffadar Ram Bhaj, I.O.M. (also mentioned)
 5088 Lance-Daffadar Khuda Baksh.
 5228 Lance-Daffadar Attar Singh.
 Mentions .. Lieut.-Colonel J. G. Pecoek.
 Lieut.-Colonel R. George.
 Major V. J. E. Patterson.
 Major G. E. M. Meadows.
 Captain C. J. Still.
 Captain C. W. Ridley.
 Lieutenant W. D. Vanrennen.
 Lieutenant D. L. M. Murphy.
 Lieutenant G. Laverick.
 2nd-Lieutenant A. F. W. Humphrey.
 Risaldar Amir Singh.
 Jemadar Sundar Dass.
 2619 Daffadar Lochan Singh.
 3938 Sowar Sagar Singh.

ROYAL ARTILLERY

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—Two D.S.O.'s, ten M.C.'s, two D.C.M.'s, sixteen M.M.'s.

Bar to D.S.O. . . Brigadier W. H. B. Mirrlees, D.S.O., M.C.

- M.C. .. Major E. J. Wyld.
 M.B.E. .. Major M. I. Gregson.

1ST FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

- D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel T. S. Dobree, M.C.
 Lieut.-Colonel H. Thorne Thorne.

- M.C. .. Major S. I. Derry.
 Major T. Kitcat.
 Major J. C. D. Howland.
 Captain F. G. E. Martin.
 Captain S. Sherwood.
 Lieutenant F. D. Morison.
 Lieutenant H. N. Straker.
 Lieutenant D. R. V. Tate.

- D.C.M. .. B. S. M. D. A. Bishop.
 L/Sergeant A. Hickling.
 Gunner R. Reddington.

- M.M. . B. S. M. J. Muir.
 L/Sergeant G. W. Walker.
 L/Sergeant M. Kirby.
 Bombardier A. Ross.
 Bombardier J. D. Bell.
 Bombardier G. Cartwright.
 Bombardier C. Crosby.
 Bombardier Mathew Brown.
 L/Bombardier J. G. Dryden.
 L/Bombardier Roy E. Smith.
 Gunner G. W. Burge.
 Gunner Harry Moore.
 Gunner B. Grant.

3RD FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

- D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel P. H. Teesdale, M.C.
 M.M. .. B. S. M. R. A. Brown
 B. S. M. F. F. R. Davies.
 L/Bombardier A. S. Wolfe.

4TH FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

- M.C. .. Captain W. H. Edwards.
 D.C.M. .. Sergeant George Cunningham.
 M.M. .. B. S. M. J. Raisbeck.
 Bombardier B. L. Horrocks.

11TH FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

M.C.	..	Major J. F. E. Huntley. Captain F. R. Jephson. Captain L. L. Boyd.
D.C.M.	..	Sergeant J. Keelan.
M.M.	..	B. S. M. G. E. Wilkinson. Sergeant C. H. J. Found.

25TH FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel H. C. W. Eastman, M.V.O. Major W. L. Newell. Captain P. W. G. Pope, M.C. Captain G. J. B. Masters.
M.B.E.	..	Major P. T. Tower.
M.C.	..	Captain J. Mackenzie. Captain J. H. Firth. Lieutenant R. O. Hill.
M.M.	..	Sergeant H. H. Hill. Sergeant F. Purbrick. Sergeant H. Seyner. L/Sergeant A. E. Kirby. Bombardier E. Morris. Bombardier J. Tricklebank. L/Bombardier T. McQueen. L/Bombardier L. Skillings. Gunner W. O'Neill. Driver C. S. Staines.

31ST FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel C. Goulder, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel C. H. Norton.
M.C.	..	Major A. Galletti. Major D. J. Ward. Captain M. Clinton Hall. Captain W. H. Calvert. Captain D. B. Collenette. Captain A. E. May. Lieutenant P. J. S. Windham Wright. 2nd Lieutenant R. N. Gutteridge.
D.C.M.	..	B. S. M. R. Julian. Sergeant Norman Sander.
M.M.	..	L/Sergeant H. F. Holder. Bombardier C. Smailes. Bombardier D. Shackleton.

M.M. .. L/Bombardier W. F. Bonney.
 Gunner G. E. W. Hancock.
 Gunner A. J. Winter.
 Gunner J. Reardon.
 Gunner D. Simpson.

97TH FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

M.C. .. Major H. M. Alfrey, D.S.O.
 Captain H. M. Wise.
 Lieutenant C. W. Dawes.
 M.M. .. B. S. M. P. E. Baker.
 B. S. M. H. R. Peters.
 Gunner E. G. Harris.
 Gunner J. G. Wilmott.

121ST FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

Bar to M.C. .. Major N. W. Metcalfe, M.C.
 M.M. .. L/Sergeant F. Hannon.

157TH FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

M.M. .. Gunner J. A. T. Hart.

164TH FIELD REGIMENT R.A.

M.C. .. Captain F. W. Williamson.

1ST LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT R.A.

M.M. .. Sergeant P. D. M. Burridge.
 Sergeant B. Barnes.
 Sergeant A. R. G. Carrington.

25TH LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT R.A.

M.C. .. Lieutenant W. S. Calvert.

57TH LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT R.A.

M.C. .. Lieutenant M. H. C. McDermot.
 Lieutenant W. M. Dodds.
 2nd-Lieutenant G. E. P. Fawcett.
 D.C.M. .. Gunner R. H. Roper
 M.M. .. B.Q.M.S. J. Alborn.
 Sergeant O. E. Williams.
 Sergeant C. Pusey.
 Sergeant T. A. Harding.

M.M.	..	Sergeant G. Pollard. Sergeant F. Guest. Sergeant R. Watson. Sergeant A. Holden. Sergeant B. G. Ward L/Bombardier J. J. Walker. Gunner P. Malton.
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13TH ANTI-TANK REGIMENT R.A.

M.M.	..	L/Bombardier H. H. V. Crane.
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65TH (NORFOLK YEOMANRY) ANTI-TANK REGIMENT R.A.

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel K. W. Hervey.
M.B.E.	..	Captain H. E. Tanner.
M.C.	..	Major J. H. Boag. Lieutenant J. M. Hapgood.
D.C.M.	..	B.S.M. G. R. Hewitson. Gunner J. D. Chapman.
M.M.	..	Sergeant R. H. Hewish. L/Sergeant D. Lockyear. L/Bombardier E. J. Gray.

95TH ANTI-TANK REGIMENT R.A.

M.C.	..	Major P. A. Hinde
D.C.M.	..	Gunner E. A. Windsor.

149TH ANTI-TANK REGIMENT R.A.

D.S.O.	..	Major J. Waller, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel G. L. Hildebrand.
M.C.	..	Major I. G. Clark. Captain G. W. Hawkes. Lieutenant A. E. W. Rumsey. Lieutenant A. C. Galbraith. Lieutenant R. L. Charles. Lieutenant C. A. Freeman.
D.C.M.	..	Bombardier D. F. Dwyer.
M.M.	..	Bombardier H. Strange.

INDIAN ARTILLERY

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—Five I.D.S.M.'s

M.C.	..	Captain Ranbir Bakshi.
I.O.M.	..	Subedar Nur Khan.
I.D.S.M.	..	AAA/1991 Havildar Hakim Khan. 37876 Havildar Ali Bahadur.



A Garhwal.

- I.D.S.M. .. AA/1165 Havildar Sham Lall.
 16905 Havildar Lall Khan.
 35245 Havildar Kehar Singh.
 38620 Havildar Mohammed Khan.
 16112 Havildar Pritam Singh (Royal Artillery).
 AAA/5122 Gunner Balbir Singh.
 AAA/4064 Gunner Suda Rang.
 21142 Driver Mechanic Rehmat Khan.
- Mentions .. Lieut.-Colonel Bhagwan Singh.
 Subedar Lakhmair Singh.
 I.W.O. II. Ditta Allah.
 37918 Havildar Sharam Singh.
 100479 L/Havildar Pahlad Singh.
 39891 Naik Mohammed Sarwar.
 39305 Naik Dalip Singh.
 64 Lance-Naik Tarlak Nath.
 40327 Lance-Naik Mohammed Khan.
 44335 Lance-Naik Nazir Mohammed.
 121 Gunner Mohammed Shaffi.
 39843 Gunner Mohammed Khan.
 100677 Driver Mohammed Siddiq.

2ND INDIAN FIELD REGIMENT

- D.S.O. .. Major P. P. Kumaramangalam.
 I.O.M. .. 34707 Havildar Modan Singh.
 I.D.S.M. .. 100258 Havildar Major Lakshmi Narusa.
 9894 Havildar Bahadur Khan.
 6364 Havildar Ghulam Ali.
 40490 Naik Kehar Singh.
 101291 Lance-Naik Yesudas.

CORPS OF INDIAN ENGINEERS

- D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel W. H. Prendergast (also mentioned).
 Lieut.-Colonel J. B. Robertson.
- M.B.E. .. Major J. C. Lejeune.
 Captain R. T. Carr.
- M.C. .. Captain A. C. Horsley.
- I.D.S.M. .. 39395 Havildar Mohammed Ismail.
- B.E.M. .. 25306 Sapper Gharib.
 15219 Sapper J. E. Rossenrode.
- Mentions .. Major D. H. St P. Walsh.
 Captain R. E. Aserappa.
 Captain E. T. H. Alexander.

Mentions	..	Lieutenant W. S. Harland. 13617 Havildar J. de Metre. 49009 Havildar Tatya Mane. 49155 Havildar Vithal Jadhar. 3604 Naik Mohal Hussain. 4500 Lance-Naik Gurdit Singh. 1066 Sapper Pakha Singh. 3935 Pioneer Munshi Khan. 830 Storekeeper Abdul Wahid.
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QUEEN VICTORIA'S OWN MADRAS SAPPERS AND MINERS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—Two I.O.M.s', one I.D.S.M. and one Mention.

M.B.E.	..	Major E. Waring. Major A. Morris. Subedar Rangasamiyar.
D.C.M.	..	C.S.M. J. Webber.
I.O.M.	..	Jemadar Joganathan (also mentioned). 17272 Naik Krishnan.
I.D.S.M.	..	Jemadar Govindasami. 13659 Coy. Havildar Major Varadan. 13080 Havildar Arokiasamy. 16750 Havildar Peter. 17742 Havildar Duraimuthu. 15342 Naik Govindnan. 17431 Lance-Naik Harikrishnan. 17829 Sapper Muthuraj.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel C. D. Read. Lieut.-Colonel D. C. T. Swan. Lieut.-Colonel R. S. B. Ward, M.C. Major R. K. Kochhar. Major H. E. G. St. George. Captain J. H. Partridge. Captain E. B. Wharton. Captain A. R. Jardine. Captain F. F. Radford. Lieutenant T. A. L. Banks. 2nd-Lieutenant Subbarayon, I.O.M. 2nd-Lieutenant D. B. Wallace. Subedar Ranga Reddy. Subedar Kondayya, I.O.M. Subedar Lakshmanan. Jemadar Appa Rao. Jemadar Malliga Arjun. Jemadar Palanivelu.

Mentions .. 13246 Havildar Paiadiah.
 16608 Havildar Krishnan.
 14745 Naik Sheikh Mustan.
 13838 Naik K. M. George.

KING GEORGE V'S OWN BENGAL SAPPERS AND MINERS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—Two M.C.'s, one I.O.M., one I.D.S.M. and two Mentions.

D.S.O. & O.B.E. Lieut.-Colonel J. H. Blundell.
 O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel A. H. G. Napier.*
 M.B.E. .. 2nd-Lieutenant Bakhtawar Singh.
 Subedar Abdul Ghafur
 M.C. .. Major W. J. A. Murray (also mentioned).
 Lieutenant J. R. S. Baldwin.
 I.O.M. .. Subedar Asanandan Singh (also mentioned).
 20113 Havildar Babu Singh.
 I.D.S.M. . Jemadar Imdad Khan.
 Jemadar Narindar Singh (also mentioned).
 Jemadar Sajjan Singh.
 Jemadar Gurbachan Singh.
 1706 Havildar Radikha Pershad.
 11965 Havildar Fazal Shah
 1514 Naik Ghulam Qadir.
 21124 Naik Taj Mahommed.
 21286 Lance-Naik Hari Singh.
 Mentions .. Major J. G. A. J. O'Ferrall.
 Major I. H. Lyall Grant.
 Lieutenant J. H. C. Roberts
 Subedar Abdul Ghafoor.
 Subedar Khushi Mohammed.
 Jemadar Ahmed Din.
 Jemadar Nasrulla Khan.
 Jemadar Kirat Singh, I.O.M.
 Jemadar Bachittar Singh.
 366 Havildar Gurbachan Singh.
 666 Havildar Achhra Singh, I.D.S.M.
 562 Havildar Mohammed Akbar Khan.
 12279 Havildar Amar Singh.
 1064 Naik Imdad Khan.
 21151 Naik Bhup Shamsher Singh.
 20616 Sapper Nawab Khan.

ROYAL BOMBAY SAPPERS AND MINERS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One Victoria Cross, one O.B.E., one M.B.E., one M.C., one I.O.M., two I.D.S.Ms' and three Mentions.

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel H. P. Cavendish, O.B.E. (also twice mentioned).
M.B.E.	..	Major N. L. Stuart (also mentioned).
M.C.	..	Major J. H. S. Bowring. Lieutenant M. M. Pillai. Lieutenant J. K. Beart-Foss. 2nd-Lieutenant R. W. St. G. Tyler.
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Sakhawat Hussain Shah (also twice mentioned). Subedar Ananda Jagtap (also mentioned). Jemadar Bacharan Jadhao. 12729 Havildar Basappa Salunke. 40606 L/Havildar Nur-ul-Huq. 41110 Lance-Naik Balkrishna Yarundkar. 41089 Sapper Shankar Bhor.
B.E.M.	..	12739 Havildar Ghulam Nabi. 12179 Lance-Naik Noor Hussain.
Mentions	..	Major R. W. W. Row. Major J. McC. Smith. Major G. V. C. Darley. Major R. C. Orgill. Captain P. P. Miles. Captain G. C. J. Rotter. Lieutenant B. A. A. Plummer. Lieutenant P. C. M. Mills. 2nd-Lieutenant E. G. Cox. C.S.M. F. H. Pellett. Subedar Daulatrao Jadhao. Subedar Rahmat Khan, I.O.M. Jemadar Lachman Singh. Jemadar Maroti Ghorpade. Jemadar Mangal Singh. 13162 Havildar Balkrishna Jagtap. 12495 L/Havildar Pir Shah. 41143 Lance-Naik Swaran Singh. 41795 Sapper Pritam Singh. 13439 Sapper Thakar Singh. 41066 Sapper Rakha Singh.

AUXILIARY PIONEERS

I.D.S.M.	..	Jemadar Yakub Khan.
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A Madrassi.

INDIAN SURVEY UNITS

Mentions .. Subedar K. B. Muthana.

ROYAL CORPS OF SIGNALS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One D.S.O., one M.B.E., one M.C., six M.M.'s and sixteen Mentions.

D.S.O. O.B.E. Lieut.-Colonel F. P. L. Gray.

O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel C. L. Morgan.

M.B.E. .. Captain T. H. Jessop.

M.C. .. Captain C. S. Currie.

D.C.M. .. Sergeant J. R. Romaines.

M.M. .. L/Corporal T. W. Sales.

Signalman E. Wilson.

Mention .. Corporal S. F. Craddock.

(It is regretted that this list is far from complete.)

INDIAN SIGNAL CORPS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One I.O.M., one M.B.E., seven I.D.S.M.'s and seven Mentions.

M.B.E. .. Major F. G. Lawrence.

Captain Apar Singh.

I.D.S.M. .. Jemadar Fauja Singh (also mentioned).

Jemadar Sardara Singh.

A.344 Havildar Santokh Singh.

9082 Havildar Naranjan Singh.

A.299 Havildar Kartar Singh.

9088 Havildar Bostan Khan.

A.1867 Naik Jagat Singh.

A.1964 Lance-Naik Madhavamenon.

A.1764 Lance-Naik Kesava Rao.

A.2672 Lance-Naik Muthiah.

A.2546 Lance-Naik Chockalingam.

A.1956 Lance-Naik Jogindar Singh.

A.316 Signalman Amar Singh.

A.5465 Signalman Partap Singh.

9015 Signalman A. George.

Mentions .. Major J. H. Lander.

Jemadar Abdul Majid.

I.W.O. II. Syed Mohammed Shah.

9557 Naik Raman Rao.

9883 Naik Abdul Kuddud.

A.1791 Naik Ghulam Haider.

A.253 Lance-Naik Syed Ghore.

Mentions	..	A.1235 Lance-Naik Nazar Singh. A.2645 Lance-Naik Poonacha. A.1592 Signalman Pakhar Singh. A.2350 Signalman Gurbaksh Singh. 15948 Signalman W. S. R. Martin. A.8201 Signalman Mohammed Zaman.
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THE BUFFS

M.M.	..	Corporal J. E. Stephenson. Private Jack Ruane.
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THE ROYAL FUSILIERS

Bar to M.C.	..	Captain F. W. Courtney, M.C.
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THE WEST YORKSHIRE REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—Five M.C.'s, one D.C.M. and six M.M.'s.

D.S.O.	..	Major M. A. Osborne, M.C.
M.C.	..	2nd-Lieutenant P. P. Steel. 2nd-Lieutenant G. M. Harrod.
M.M.	..	Sergeant John Lyon. Sergeant W. Beddingfield. Corporal H. Hopwood. Corporal W. R. Gibbs. L/Corporal C L. Rice. L/Corporal F. Stacey. L/Corporal L. Rawcliffe. Private L. Crane. Private R. Craggs. Private William Wilson.

SOUTH WALES BORDERERS

M.C.	..	Captain R. W. P. Parry.
M.M.	..	Corporal Alfred Davies.

THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One M.C., four M.M.'s and one Mention.

Bar to M.C.	..	Major D. H. Nott, D.S.O., M.C. Captain R. L. Dray, M.C.
M.C.	..	2nd-Lieutenant F. N. Lynes. 2nd-Lieutenant J. J. Horton.
D.C.M.	..	Private Kenneth Hunt. Private Harold Newman.

- M.M. .. Sergeant J. L. Winter.
 Sergeant S. G. Phillips.
 Private D. Goodchild.

THE DUKE OF CORNWALL'S LIGHT INFANTRY

- M.B.E. .. C.S.M. H. E. Walker.
 M.C. .. Lieutenant C. S. Denman.
 D.C.M. .. Sergeant Leonard Holt.
 M.M. .. Corporal C. J. Pascoe.

THE ROYAL SUSSEX REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—Two M.C.'s, one D.C.M. and four M.M.'s.

- Barto D.S.O... Lieut.-Colonel G. C. Evans, D.S.O.
 D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel C. E. Firth.
 M.C. .. Major R. E. S. Shinkwin.
 Captain S. J. F. Upton.
 Captain G. W. Hawkes.
 Captain L. W. Weeks.
 Captain B. B. Clegg.
 2nd-Lieutenant G. P. Bidder.
 M.M. and Bar . Sergeant J. Bungard.
 M.M. .. C.S.M. J. Greenfield.
 Sergeant D. R. G. Coppard.
 Sergeant W. R. Russell.
 Sergeant P. C. A. Brennan.
 L/Corporal F. W. Hall.
 L/Corporal J. H. Hickman.
 Private A. J. Paterson.
 Private Benjamin Ives.
 Private N. W. Mackinlay.
 Private E. G. Peacock.
 Private E. Rossiter.

THE WELCH REGIMENT

- M.M. .. Sergeant T. Greenwood.
 Sergeant J. Haynes.

THE ESSEX REGIMENT

- D.S.O. and M.C. Captain Jack Watts.
 D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel A. Noble.
 Major J. J. Malcolm Smith.

M.C.	..	Major L. W. A. Chappell. Captain H. J. Young. Captain F. J. Ketteley. Captain H. C. Gregory. Lieutenant D. J. Beech. Lieutenant C. Hailes.
D.C.M.	..	Sergeant E. K. Chapman. Private E. B. Hazle. Private George Jackson.
M.M.	..	Sergeant J. F. Laplain. Sergeant Thomas Horne. Corporal H. T. Brewer. Corporal H. T. Taylor. Corporal Henry Thompson. L/Corporal George Hudson. L/Corporal J. S. Teeder. L/Corporal J. T. Glibbery. L/Corporal E. N. Bartlett. Private C. B. Mathews. Private W. B. Hazel. Private John Stringer. Private G. Z. F. M. Carter. L/Sergeant A. Marjoram.

THE HIGHLAND LIGHT INFANTRY

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel D. G. Thorburn, O.B.E., M.C.
D.C.M.	..	Sergeant Hugh Gateley.
M.M.	..	C.S.M. H. O'Pray. Corporal J. McGarvey. L/Corporal H. Murray.

THE QUEEN'S OWN CAMERON HIGHLANDERS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel C. S. Duncan.
M.C.	..	2nd-Lieutenant E. M. Ross. 2nd-Lieutenant G. Stewart.
M.M.	..	Sergeant S. Gray, D.C.M. Sergeant J. Cameron. Private W. Parkin. Private R. McKenzie. Sergeant A. Campbell.

(This list is unfortunately far from complete, owing to the capture of the battalion in Tobruk.)



A Punjabi Mussalman.

1ST PUNJAB REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One C.B.E., one D.S.O., one O.B.E., one M.B.E., eight M.C.'s, six I.O.M.'s, twenty-two I.D.S.M.'s and ten Mentions.

C.B.	..	Major-General C. W. Toovey, C.B.E., M.C.
D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel A. W. Lowther.
O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel M. C. Frye. Major I. C. Middleton Stewart (also Croix de Guerre and mentioned).
M.C. and Bar.	..	Captain Budh Singh.
Bar to M.C.	..	Captain J. A. Robertson, M.C.
M.C.	..	Captain J. R. Greaves. Captain H. C. Buck.
I.O.M.	..	Subedar Fatteh Singh (also twice mentioned) Jemadar Mir Afzal. Jemadar Mohammed Zarin. 12831 Sepoy Mohammed Ayub Khan.
I.D.S.M.	..	Jemadar Muzaffar Khan. Jemadar Mohammed Abbas. Jemadar Adai Kalyan Singh. 12375 Havildar Jogindar Singh. 12569 Havildar Gul Rahman. 9775 Naik Mansabdar. 10706 Naik Rahim Dad. 12049 Naik Hazara Singh. 8927 Lance-Naik Ujagar Singh. 10435 Lance-Naik Surjan Singh. 12582 Lance-Naik Indar Singh. 12083 Sepoy Chhotu Singh.
Mentions	..	Colonel J. B. Dalison, O.B.E. Lieut.-Colonel W. A. Whitehead, D.S.O. Lieut.-Colonel H. E. Greatwood.* Major W. G. Hingston. Major R. N. D. Frior, M.C. Major W. H. R. Clifford. Major C. B. Appleby. Captain J. A. G. Harley, M.C. Captain P. A. R. Reyne (twice, also Croix de Guerre). Captain P. G. Routley. Captain P. J. R. Petit, M.C. Captain M. A. Khan. Captain Dayal Singh. Captain S. Dun. Lieutenant J. B. Bartley.

- Mentions** .. 2nd-Lieutenant K. Z. Tiwana.
 Subedar Major Ujagar Singh, O.B.I.*
 Subedar Dogar Singh, I.O.M.
 Subedar Mohammed Sher, I.D.S.M. (also Croix de Guerre)
 Subedar Mohammed Akbar, I.O.M.
 Jemadar Jan Mohammed.
 7677 Havildar Bhanwar Singh.
 11069 Havildar Ghulam Haider.
 10182 Havildar Khani Zaman, I.O.M.
 8224 Havildar Sadhu Singh.
 10837 Naik Fazal Dad.
 11653 Naik Fazal Ilahi.
 8125 Naik Jit Singh.
 7848 Naik Pooran Singh.
 12845 Lance-Naik Jagjit Singh.
 8082 Lance-Naik Mukand Singh.
 11847 Lance-Naik Pir Mohammed.
 7190 Lance-Naik Puran Singh.
 12937 Sepoy Mohammed Ashraf.
 13762 Sepoy Fazal Din.
 7079 Sepoy Kirpal Singh.
 13971 Sepoy Karnail Singh.
 14006 Sepoy Pala Singh.
 11166 Sepoy Pritam Singh.
 10318 Sepoy Richhpal Singh (also Croix de Guerre).
 13756 Sepoy Sher Baz.
 12893 Sepoy Sabit Ullah, I.O.M.
 10643 Sepoy Mangu Singh.*
 11702 Sepoy Sital Singh.
 Sepoy Sultan Khan.
Croix de Guerre. Captain C. J. Boulter, M.C.*

2ND PUNJAB REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—Three D.S.O.'s, two M.C.'s, two I.O.M.'s, five I.D.S.M.'s and seven Mentions.

- Second Bar** .. Brigadier B. H. Chappell, D.S.O.
 to D.S.O.
D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel C. C. Deakin (also mentioned).
O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel C. H. D. O'Callaghan.
M.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel Lakhinder Singh.
M.C. .. Lieutenant D. Milman (also mentioned).
 Lieutenant D. M. Murray
 2nd Lieutenant S. M. Afzal Khan.



A Mahratta.

I.O.M. 1st Class.	Subedar Dhera Singh, I.O.M. (also mentioned).
I.O.M. ..	Subedar Hem Raj (also mentioned).
	Subedar Fazal Ilahi (also twice mentioned).
	13535 Havildar Nur Khan.
	8853 Naik Jagat Singh.
	15302 Sepoy Shiv Ram.
Bar to I.D.S.M.	13770 Lance-Naik Krishen Singh, I.D.S.M.
I.D.S.M. ..	Subedar Badar-ud-Din, O.B.I. (also mentioned).
	Jemadar Pritam Singh.
	10885 Havildar Abdul Malik.
	12341 Havildar Gian Chand
	7907 Havildar Balak Ram.
	7531 Naik Rala Ram.
	10283 Lance-Naik Kishen Singh.
	13488 Lance-Naik Mehnga Singh.
	13699 Lance-Naik Harbans Singh.
	14590 Sepoy Chuhru Ram.
	15627 Sepoy Itbar Khan.
Mentions ..	Colonel J. E. Hirst.
	Major F. C. A. Kerin.
	Major L. D. Gleeson.
	Major C. J. Veevers.
	Captain H. E. Mansel-Edwards.
	Captain J. F. Worsley.
	Captain J. G. Hubbard.
	Subedar Mohammed Baksh, O.B.I., I.O.M.
	Subedar Shah Mohammed.
	Jemadar Alam Khan.
	Jemadar Amar Singh, I.O.M.
	Jemadar Abuzar Khan.
	Jemadar Lakhmi Dass.
	12064 Havildar Chanan Singh.
	11907 Havildar Gurchar Singh (twice).
	9483 Havildar Khushi Ram.
	9576 L/Havildar Kanshi Ram.
	10412 Lance-Naik Adalat Khan.
	Khitmagar D. M. Anthony.
	4TH BOMBAY GRENADIERS
M.B.E. ..	Subedar Major Shamshad Khan, O.B.I.
Mention ..	Major T. H. Waumsley, M.C.
	5TH MAHRATTA LIGHT INFANTRY
	Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—Two D.S.O.'s,
	four M.C.'s, eight I.O.M.'s, six I.D.S.M.'s and one Mention.
C.B.E. ..	Brigadier D. W. Reid, D.S.O., M.C.

D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel M. P. Lancaster (also mentioned).
 O.B.E. .. Colonel T. H. Boss, M.C. (also mentioned).
 Bar to M.C. .. Captain A. J. Oldham, M.C.
 I.O.M. .. Subedar Major Raojirao Shinde (also mentioned).
 Subedar Vishwamher Ghadge (also mentioned).
 7628 Sepoy Babaji Desai.

I.D.S.M. .. 7922 Havildar Bapu Jadhao.
 4429 Havildar Baji Nalaode.
 2078 Havildar Narayan Shirole.
 4446 Havildar Narayan Naikwade.
 3964 Havildar Ganpat Chawan.
 3728 Havildar Yeshwant Jadhao.
 5439 Havildar Maruti More.
 9492 Naik Narayan Surwase.
 8767 Lance-Naik Sidu Jadhao.
 6078 Lance-Naik Maruti Shinde.
 7917 Lance-Naik Dawlat Powar (also mentioned).
 9298 Lance-Naik Vishnu Kohate.
 8277 Sepoy Balu Powar.
 9423 Sepoy Haihati Sawant.
 4011 Sepoy Maruti Falke.

Mentions .. Lieut.-Colonel A. O. Kersey, M.C.
 Major J. H. Trim.
 Captain A. M. Palande.
 2nd-Lieutenant H. Hargreaves.
 2nd-Lieutenant P. C. Howorth.
 Subedar Major Pandirath Korhale, O.B.I.
 Subedar Dinkar Lawande.
 Jemadar Bapujirao Kadam.
 Jemadar Govind Desai.
 Jemadar Laxuman Jadhao.
 Jemadar Sakharam Shinde, I.O.M.
 8664 Havildar Samulla Khan.
 5639 Havildar Dyanu Chawan, I.O.M.
 2132 Havildar Datthu Powar.
 7561 Naik Antu Gugar.
 7589 Naik Chandrasen Gaikwad.
 4459 Naik Narayan Jagtap.
 1850 Naik Parashram Khirsagar.
 4143 Sepoy Harry Anthony.
 4823 Sepoy Maruti Surwase.
 9731 Sepoy Pandurang Powar, I.O.M.



A Rajput.

- Mentions .. 2988 Sepoy Shankar Naik.
 9192 Sepoy Yeshwant Ghadge.
 8014 Sepoy Amar Sing.

6TH RAJPUTANA RIFLES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One VICTORIA Cross, three D.S.O.'s, one O.B.E., one M.B.E., seven M.C.'s, fourteen I.O.M.'s, seventeen I.D.S.M.'s and thirty Mentions.

VICTORIA CROSS. Company Havildar Major Chhelu Ram.

Bar to D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel P. R. H. Skrine, D.S.O.*

D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel W. A. L. James.

Lieut.-Colonel R. Lawrenson.

Lieut.-Colonel R. B. Scott (also mentioned and Croix de Guerre).

M.C. .. Captain G. E. Charter.

Captain Mian Khan.

Captain C. E. Cayley.

Captain G. R. Riddick.

Captain K. R. Gentles.

Captain T. B. Surita.

Captain J. R. M. Ffrench.

2nd-Lieutenant N. L. Kapur.

2nd-Lieutenant Bashir Ahmed.

I.O.M. 1st Class. Subedar Niaz Ali Khan, I.O.M.*

I.O.M. .. Subedar Jiwan Ram.

Subedar Akbar Khan.

Subedar Mohammed Yusuf.

Jemadar Boluta Ram.

Jemadar Dhura Ram.

Jemadar Jailal Ram.

13835 Havildar Mohammed Akbar.

15547 Havildar Hardewa Ram.

13858 Havildar Fattah Khan.

12704 Havildar Durjan Singh.

17023 Naik Dost Mohammed.

19024 Rifleman Dharam Singh Ram.

I.D.S.M. .. Subedar Sukh Ram.

Subedar Govinda Ram.

Jemadar Gopichand Ram.

Jemadar Bhagwana Ram.

Jemadar Lall Khan (also mentioned).

Jemadar Jita Ram.

Jemadar Bhopal Singh, I.O.M.

Jemadar Gurdial Ram.

13289 Havildar Panna Ram.

- I.D.S.M. .. 12291 Havildar Mull Singh.
 13375 Havildar Inayat Khan.
 12918 Havildar Phula Ram.
 13890 Havildar Ratti Ram.
 14218 Havildar Mohammed Niwaz.
 13330 Havildar Atta Mohammed.
 13293 Havildar Juglal Ram.
 10516 Havildar Neki Ram.
 17787 Naik Bhagwana Ram.
 12658 Naik Ramnath Ram.
 14836 Naik Hem Singh.
 14768 Naik Begraj Ram.
 14445 Naik Het Ram.
 18499 Naik Mohammed Inayat Ali.
 13304 Lance-Naik Jugat Singh.
 20524 Lance-Naik Chandgi Ram.
 13690 Lance-Naik Bega Ram.
 19530 Lance-Naik Kasi Ram.
 18774 Lance-Naik Khushi Mohammed.
 20386 Lance-Naik Kalyan Singh.
 17932 Rifleman Nandkaran Ram.
 17012 Rifleman Puran Ram.
 15241 Rifleman Mangal Singh.
 23251 Rifleman Fidda Hussain
 26549 Rifleman Mohammed Yusuf.
 28354 Rifleman Harsukh Ram.
- Mentions .. Brigadier T. W. Rees, C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C.
 Brigadier C. M. Hutchings, C.B.E. (twice).
 Lieut.-Colonel L. Jones, D.S.O. (twice, also
 Croix de Guerre).
 Major H. Q. Boulter.
 Major F. E. F. Cuerden.
 Major J. R. West.
 Captain H. A. Butler.*
 Captain C. R. Kirke.
 Captain G. F. T. Mathews.*
 Lieutenant J. McA Hadden, D.S.O.
 Lieutenant I. A. Knowles.
 Lieutenant R. R. M. MacLeod.*
 2nd-Lieutenant L. H. Samuels.
 Subedar Major Narain Singh, O.B.I.*
 Subedar Amar Singh, I.O.M.
 Subedar Bostan Khan, I.O.M.
 Subedar Jagana Ram, I.O.M.
 Jemadar Gopal Ram.

- Mentions . . Jemadar Binjraf Singh.
 Jemadar Hoshiaz Singh, I.O.M., I.D.S.M. (twice,
 also Croix de Guerre).
 Jemadar Jodha Ram.
 Jemadar Mohammed Sadiq.
 Jemadar Rampat Ram.
 Jemadar Jainarain Ram.
 Jemadar Richhpal Singh.
 Jemadar Jora Ram.
 14778 Havildar Goru Ram, I.O.M.
 13182 Havildar Gharsi Ram.
 14554 Havildar Amra Khan (also Croix de
 Guerre).
 9804 Havildar Jora Ram.
 14684 Havildar Habib Khan, I.O.M.
 14324 Havildar Lal Singh.
 11440 Havildar Sheodan Singh, I.D.S.M.
 9854 Havildar Mir Alam.
 13089 Havildar Neki Ram.
 12043 Havildar Ramsarup Ram.
 11620 Havildar Sukhdial Ram.
 13340 Havildar Usman Ghani.
 12979 Havildar Bhagechand Ram.
 9486 Naik Sardar Singh.
 15026 Naik Jita Ram.
 12291 Naik Mul Singh.
 10687 Naik Ladhu Ram.
 16151 Naik Nawab Khan.
 17306 Naik Sagarmal Ram.
 15159 Naik Bhopal Singh.
 11718 Lance-Naik Bhom Singh.
 8739 Lance-Naik Harji Ram.
 14615 Lance-Naik Mahji Khan, I O.M.
 13635 Lance-Naik Mohammed Akbar.
 11000 Lance-Naik Ramkanwar Singh.
 12811 Lance-Naik Mohammed Yar.
 16883 Lance-Naik Phul Singh.
 15903 Lance-Naik Lalchand Ram.
 15328 Rifleman Chandgi Ram.
 16988 Rifleman Harphul Ram.
 17041 Rifleman Khiali Ram.
 18053 Rifleman Ladhu Ram.
 15809 Rifleman Sheochand Ram.
 15039 Rifleman Rugnath Singh.

7TH RAJPUT REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One O.B.E., one M.C., two I.D.S.M.'s and eleven Mentions.

D.S.O.	..	Lieutenant D. B. Harrel.
O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel S. W. Bower* (also mentioned).
M.B.E.	..	Major W. T. Yeoman.
M.C.	..	Captain H. C. S. Davies.
I.O.M.	..	Jemadar Ram Bali Singh.
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Mohammed Yusuf. Subedar Mohammed Aziz. Subedar Balwant Singh. Subedar Sukhdeo Singh. 13140 Havildar Dharam Singh. 7579 Havildar Shah Mohammed. 14177 Havildar Jitpal Singh. 14691 Havildar Mohammed Sharif. 14879 Havildar Mohammed Khan. 15640 Lance-Naik Jalal Din. 10875 Sepoy Allah Ditta.
Mentions	..	Brigadier A. Rae, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel W. E. Norrish. Captain J. F. Ballin.* Captain S. A. Casson. Captain A. R. C. Perceval. Subedar Major Jugat Singh, O.B.I. Subedar Major Ahmad Khan. Jemadar Abdul Sattar. Jemadar Burhan Ali. Jemadar Sanwal Singh. 7889 Havildar Harban Singh. 10449 Havildar Kaptan Singh. 8530 Havildar Chanderpai Singh.

8TH PUNJAB REGIMENT

VICTORIA CROSS.		Havildar Parkash Singh.
D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel H. L. Wyndham.
M.B.E.	..	Major L. R. Walker.
I.O.M.	..	8547 Havildar Lal Singh. 13743 Naik Godhu Ram.
I.D.S.M.	..	14355 Naik Mani Ram. 16331 Lance-Naik Said Akbar.
Mentions	..	Major J. S. Garrett, M.B.E. Captain J. O. Graham.

9TH JAT REGIMENT

I.O.M.	..	Subedar Major Sher Mohammed, O.B.I. Jemadar Ghulam Sanwar.
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Mohammed Sharif. 11665 Naik Masita. 11955 Lance-Naik Sri Chand.
Mentions	..	Colonel E. R. S. Dods, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel B. R. Godley Major H. G. V. Boulter. Captain I. Liddington. Captain A. W. Hislop. Captain J. L. Baker. Captain F. E. Mileham. Captain P. B. Sandford. Lieutenant A. H. Balls. Lieutenant G. R. Sell. Subedar Major Hussain Khan, O.B.I. 11187 Havildar Ghulam Mustafa. 12559 Sepoy Fateh Khan.

10TH BALUCH REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes"—Three D.S.O.'s, two I.O.M.'s, six I.D.S.M.'s and two Mentions.

Bar to D.S.O.	..	Brigadier H. W. Briggs, D.S.O. Brigadier D. R. E. R. Bateman, D.S.O. (also O.B.E. and twice mentioned). Lieut.-Colonel A. C. Taylor, D.S.O.
D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel T. I. Bowers, M.C. Major L. V. S. Sherwood* (also mentioned). Captain Siri Kanth Korla.
O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel D. Carroll.
M.B.E.	..	Major B. F. Montgomery.
M.C.	..	Major R. H. Farrimond (also mentioned). Lieutenant J. H. Thistleton Dyer.
I.O.M.	..	Subedar Fateh Khan. 11664 Havildar Mohabbat Ali. 12173 Naik Amir Khan. 18343 Sepoy Longo Ram.
I.D.S.M. & Bar	..	Jemadar Punnu Ram (also mentioned).
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Major Sher Khan, O.B.I. (also men- tioned). Coy. Havildar Major Allah Dad. 13934 Havildar Shankar Dass. 13689 Naik Mian Gul. 21492 Naik Mani Khan.

Mentions	..	Colonel J. N. Soden. Lieut.-Colonel B. L. Sundius Smith, D.S.O. Major H. K. Newsum. Major R. E. Fellows. Captain R. W. Marsden. Captain B. A. W. Cooper. Jemadar Anant Ram. Jemadar Sohan Lal. 12327 Havildar Mohammed Khan, I.O.M. 15518 Naik Chaudhuri Khan. 9938 Naik Bhagwan Dass. 24736 Naik Siri Dhar. 14663 Lance-Naik Madhu Soden. 16161 Lance-Naik Kishen Dyal. 10822 Lance-Naik Sher Khan, I.D.S.M. 17575 Sepoy Alyas Khan.
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11TH SIKH REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One K.B.E., one D.S.O., one M.B.E., three M.C.'s, two I.O.M.'s, five I.D.S.M.'s and one Mention.

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel J. J. Purves, M.C. (also mentioned). Captain Tajmohammed Khanzada, M.C.
Bar to M.C.	..	Captain Mohammed Siddiq, M.C.
M.C.	..	Captain S. A. C. Trestrail. Captain G. F. Colley.
I.O.M.	..	Jemadar Ajit Singh. Jemadar Naginder Singh. Jemadar Gurbaksh Singh. 10231 Sepoy Basta Singh.
I.D.S.M.	.	Subedar Mohammed Khan. Jemadar Kapur Singh. 13004 Havildar Kishan Singh. 10088 Havildar Dhirta Singh (also Macgregor Memorial Medal). 13694 Havildar Sadhu Singh. 12276 Naik Raunat Singh. 14320 Naik Gurdev Singh. 13999 Naik Rur Singh. 17303 Sepoy Bhag Singh. 16420 Sepoy Dalip Singh. 16420 Sepoy Ghazni Khan. 16614 Sepoy Sohan Singh.



A Sikh.

Mentions	..	Lieut.-General Sir Lewis Heath, K.B.E., C.B., C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C.* Brigadier R. A. Savory, D.S.O., M.C. Major C. S. Nash (twice). Major R. Bampffield. Major Diwan Ranjit Rai. Major J. McFarlane. Captain J. C. Hartley. Lieutenant P. Parry Evans. 2nd Lieutenant J. B. G. Franklin. Subedar Major Harditt Singh. Subedar Fateh Mohammed, I.O.M. Jemadar Chamba Singh. 15112 Sepoy Bachan Singh. 13050 Sepoy Yasim Khan. 14411 Sepoy Basant Singh. 13690 Havildar Bishan Singh. 7654 Naik Chanan Singh. 11859 Naik Ghulam Mohammed. 16870 Sepoy Saudagar Singh. 70 Cook Fazal Ahmad.
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12TH FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One D.S.O., one M.B.E., two M.C.'s, three I.O.M.'s, four I.D.S.M.'s and one Mention.

VICTORIA CROSS	Lieut.-Colonel A. E. Cumming, M.C. (also O.B.E.).
D.S.O.	.. Lieut. Colonel W. D. Edward. Lieut.-Colonel M. H. H. Baily.
O.B.E.	.. Major A. R. E. Pollard.
M.C.	.. Captain S. G. F. J. Manekshaw. Captain A. M. S. Babington. 2nd-Lieutenant P. Stewart. Subedar Major Rai Singh, O.B.I.
I.O.M.	.. Subedar Qalandar Khan (also mentioned). Subedar Mohammed Ali.
I.D.S.M.	.. Subedar Khan Mir. Subedar Allah Yar Khan. Jemadar Sant Singh. Jemadar Tulsi Ram. 12213 Naik Din Sher. 20437 Sepoy Karamat Hussain.

Mentions	..	Brigadier N. Hugh Jones, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel L. E. Macgregor, O.B.E. Lieut.-Colonel W. E. Dean. Major P. T. Clarke, O.B.E. Major H. M. de V. Moss.* Major I. A. J. Edwards Stuard. Captain J. D. King Martin. Captain M. S. Curtis. Captain J. M. Ricketts. Captain M. H. Smith. Captain D. B. Wallace. Lieutenant D. R. C. Stewart. Lientenant D. S. Phillipps. 2nd-Lieutenant W. R. Hunter. Subedar Bela Singh, I.D.S.M. Subedar Mohammed Sharif. Subedar Sukhru Khan. Jemadar Gul Faqir. Jemadar Kartar Singh. 10582 Havildar Santri Singh. 9193 Havildar Mir Hassan, I.O.M., I.D.S.M. 11661 Havildar Khazan Khan. 10283 Havildar Khushal Khan, I.O.M 13435 Havildar Ghulam Hussain. 11811 Naik Onkar Singh. 9641 Naik Kartar Singh. 11810 Naik Quniya Gul. 13460 Naik Makhmad Din Shah. 10429 Naik Sher Singh. 14563 Lance-Naik Abdul Qadir. 15773 Sepoy Wazir Jang. 15619 Afzal Khan.
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13TH FRONTIER FORCE RIFLES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—Two O.B.E.'s, three M.C.'s, six I.O.M.'s and six I.D.S.M.'s.

D.S.O.	..	Brigadier D. Russell, O.B.E., M.C. Major V. D. Jayal (also mentioned).
M.B.E.	..	Major F. L. Roberts (also mentioned). Major W. J. Armstrong. Major W. R. Wemyss. Captain Mohammed Musa (also mentioned). Subedar Major Rur Singh.
M.C.	..	Major C. C. Metcalfe. Major W. R. Wemyss.

I.O.M.	..	Subedar Major Sohan Singh, O.B.I. Subedar Mula Singh. 15757 Sepoy Isa Khan.
I.D.S.M.	..	11289 Havildar Kehr Singh. 13267 Naik Palla Singh 9475 Lance-Naik Rattan Singh.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel C M. Malden. Major G. A. P. Goldstream. Major D. H. Wenham. Major P. Elsmie. Captain Kanyha Lal Atal (twice). Captain K. S. Katoch. Captain I. M. Fraser (twice) Captain K. A. Rahim Khan. Captain Shaukat Ali Shah. Lieutenant G. B. Sewak Singh. Subedar Adalat Khan. Subedar Amir Khan (twice). Subedar Bishan Singh. Subedar Sowar Khan. Subedar Hakim Khan. Subedar Mula Singh. Jemadar Mir Baz Khan (twice). Jemadar Munshi Ram, I.O.M. Jemadar Karim Dad. 12661 Havildar Fateh Mohammed. 14599 Havildar Usman Khan. 13713 Havildar Jaswant Singh. 12139 Havildar Khitab Gul. 12235 Havildar Clerk Faqir Singh. 14608 Naik Mira Khan.

14TH PUNJAB REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One M.C. and one Mention.

O.B.E.	..	Brigadier M. Glover.
M.C.		Lieutenant Said Shah.
I.O.M.	..	Jemadar Kartar Singh. 8355 Sepoy Sadat Khan.
I.D.S.M.	..	12148 Havildar Sobhat Khan. 9748 Naik Puran Singh. 17010 Lance-Naik Sultan Mahmud. 14808 Sepoy Tara Singh.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel T W. Boyce, M.C., M.M. Lieut.-Colonel J. C. Cotton.

Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel P. E. C. Gwyn. Major C. C. Furney. Major W. A. Putnam. Captain H. C. A. Baker. Captain W. A. Palmer, M.C. Captain J. M. Grant. 2nd-Lieutenant H. R. Maconachie. Jemadar Gurbaksh Singh. 12342 Sepoy Ali Mohammed.
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15TH PUNJAB REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One O.B.E., one M.C. and one Mention.

M.C.	..	Major E. M. Kemeys Jenkins.* Captain J. Callf. Captain D. L. Wilkinson. Captain A. C. Nicoll. 2nd-Lieutenant Syed Ghaffar Mehdi.
I.O.M.	..	7761 Havildar Mohammed Akram. 11835 Naik Wazir Badshah.
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Gul Wahid. Jemadar Chanan Singh. 6689 Havildar Sardara. 18099 L/Havildar Mohammed Salim. 9288 Lance-Naik Rup Chand. 14137 Sepoy Khial Badshah. 10002 Sepoy Bakhshish Singh.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel A. H. Pollock. Lieut.-Colonel A. A. Nicholas, M.C. Major R. C. Nicholas.* Lieutenant R. N. M. Milton.* 2nd-Lieutenant D. J. T. Owen. Subedar Chandgi Ram. Jemadar Sardara Ram. 6421 Havildar Chandu Ram. 9554 L/Havildar Lakhi Ram.

16TH PUNJAB REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One C.B.E., one D.S.O., two M.C.'s, one I.O.M., six I.D.S.M.'s and two Mentions.
Bar to D.S.O. Lieut.-Colonel S. S. Lavender, D.S.O. (also mentioned).

M.C.	..	Captain Pritam Singh. Captain W. G. Popple (also mentioned). Captain R. A. Perkin.
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A Dogra.

I.O.M.	..	9275 Havildar Bahadur Khan. 10138 Havildar Sadhu Singh.
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Mian Mohammed. Jemadar Mohammed Aslam Khan. Jemadar Jaimal Singh. 10700 Havildar Mohammed Aslam. 7553 Havildar Sakhi Mohammed. 8069 Havildar Gulshaid. 8042 Havildar Bhola Singh. 10881 Naik Chanan Singh. 9879 Lance-Naik Hukum Dad. 11432 Lance-Naik Hansa. 12397 Lance-Naik Ludhar Singh. 10009 Sepoy Harbans Singh. 11563 Sepoy Naranjan Singh. 11736 Sepoy Mohammed Niwaz. 17139 Sepoy Batna Singh. 15974 Sepoy Ghulam Rasul. 15033 Sepoy Kanshi Ram.
Mentions	..	Brigadier W. J. Cawthorn, C.I.E., C.B.E.* Captain N. G. Herbert. Captain S. W. Packwood. Captain T. O. Wate. Jemadar Dalal Din. Jemadar Nadir Khan. 9639 Naik Mohammed Fazal. 9676 Naik Noor Ilahi. 9777 Naik Dasaundhi. 7221 Naik Lal Hussain. 10105 Naik Mir Dad. 10128 Lance-Naik Sapuran Singh. 10650 Sepoy Balwant Singh. 11735 Sepoy Mohammed Khan. 12312 Sepoy Rattan Singh.

17TH DOGRA REGIMENT

O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel F. C. Simpson.
M.B.E.	..	Subedar Major Hanmant Singh.
M.C.	..	Major O. B. M. North.
I.O.M.	..	Jemadar Narain Singh. 7035 Havildar Dille Ram.
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Major Relu Ram. 7326 L/Havildar Kanshi Ram. 5717 Naik Labh Singh. 7238 Lance-Naik Dharam Singh.

Mentions .. Major R. C. Crowdy.
 Captain J. R. B. Kean.

18TH ROYAL GARHWAL RIFLES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes"—One D.S.O., two M.C.'s, five I.O.M.'s, seven I.D.S.M.'s and one Mention.

C.B.E. .. Brigadier H. L. Davies, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.
 M.B.E. .. Major J. E. M. E. C. Leask.
 M.C. .. Captain H. S. Freegard.
 I.O.M. .. 5501 Naik Thepar Sing Rana.
 7752 Naik Sain Sing Panwar.
 6259 Rifleman Pushkar Sing Chauduri.
 4702 Rifleman Chatar Sing Rawat.
 I.D.S.M. .. Jemadar Indar Sing Negi (also mentioned).
 4690 Rifleman Mangal Sing Bhandari (also mentioned).
 Mentions .. Brigadier A. E. Barlow, M.C.
 Lieut.-Colonel S. E. Tayler, D.S.O.
 Captain P. G. W. M. Coke.
 Captain J. A. Hickman.
 Captain E. G. Mainwaring.
 Captain A. Young, M.C.
 Captain D. K. Mules.
 Captain R. M. F. Oliver.
 Lieutenant J. A. Watt.
 Subedar Man Sing Negi, I.O.M.
 3999 Havildar Ude Sing Rana.
 7756 Naik Khyat Sing Negi.
 5400 Naik Alam Sing Pundit.
 7308 Lance-Naik Partab Sing Bisht.
 4781 Lance-Naik Dalip Sing Husain.
 5625 Lance-Naik Indar Sing Bhandari.
 5377 Lance-Naik Sain Sing Negi.
 7752 Lance-Naik Sain Sing Panwar.
 7512 Rifleman Daulat Singh Negi.
 5913 Rifleman Ram Sing Bisht, I.O.M.

19TH HYDERABAD REGIMENT

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes"—One C.B.E., two D.S.O.'s and one I.O.M.

O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel F. H. Skinner.
 Lieut.-Colonel H. L. Hill.
 M.B.E. .. Major H. P. Seagrim.

M.C.	..	Captain Balbir Singh. Captain Gangaram Parab. Captain L. C. Lind. Jemadar Kabul Singh.
Mentions	..	Brigadier W. L. Lloyd, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. Lieut.-Colonel J. Moffatt, O.B.E.

1ST KING GEORGE V'S OWN GURKHA RIFLES

D.S.O.	..	Brigadier J. K. Jones.
M.C.	..	Captain J. O. M. Roberts.
I.O.M.	..	Coy. Havildar Majoi Manbahadur Gurung (also mentioned).
Mentions	..	Major N. Burgan, M.C. Major L. J. G. Showers. Captain G. H. W. Bond.

2ND KING EDWARD VII'S OWN GURKHA RIFLES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One C.B.E. and one O.B.E.

VICTORIA CROSS. Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa.

C.B. and D.S.O. Major-General F. I. S. Tucker, O.B.E. (also mentioned).

D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel O. de T. Lovett (also mentioned).
Lieut.-Colonel L. J. G. Showers.

M.C. and Bar . Captain D. Ramsay Brown.

M.C. .. Major W. W. Stewart (also mentioned).
Captain M. L. Cruickshank.
Captain P. L. Stubbs.
Captain J. N. Fraser.
2nd-Lieutenant H. D. James.

I.O.M. & I.D.S.M. Jemadar Bishanbahadur Gurung.

I.O.M. .. 2867 Rifleman Birbahadur Gharti.
7071 Rifleman Surbir Thapa.
25063 Rifleman Lalbahadur Pun.

I.D.S.M. .. Subedar Kumasing Gurung.
Jemadar Harakbahadur Gurung.
Jemadar Anbahadur Thapa.
Jemadar Harakbahadur Thapa.
Jemadar Bhimbahadur Rana.
1193 Havildar Bhirbahadur Pun.
1378 Havildar Manlal Thapa.
1666 Havildar Chimbahadur Pun.
1964 Naik Tekbahadur Gurung.
1255 Naik Siridhoj Gurung.

I.D.S.M.	..	1971 Lance-Naik Sadal Sing Gurung. 2040 Lance-Naik Dalbir Ghale. 1809 Lance-Naik Nare Thapa. 2883 Rifleman Lalbahadur Gurung. 2907 Rifleman Jagbir Thapa. 2239 Rifleman Harkabahadur Gurung. 2863 Rifleman Indrabahadur Pun.
Mentions	..	Major R. A. Hutton, O.B.E. Jemadar Khatansing Gurung.

3RD QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S OWN GURKHA RIFLES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One C.B.E.

C.B.	..	Brigadier E. J. Shearer, C.B.E., M.C. (also mentioned).
C.B.E.	..	Brigadier C. H. Boucher, D.S.O.
M.C.	..	Captain W. Somerville. Captain B. G. Kinlock.
I.O.M.	..	Subedar Kishansing Thapa. Subedar Bombahadur Rai (also mentioned).
I.D.S.M.	..	Jemadar Kulipsing Rai. 6958 Havildar Tejbir Gurung. 6516 Naik Harkabahadur Rana. 7969 Lance-Naik Churamani Thapa.
Mentions	..	Captain C. D. Carver. Captain M. G. Durant. 2nd-Lieutenant B. H. Darley. 10227 Rifleman Hazurman Rai.

4TH PRINCE OF WALES' OWN GURKHA RIFLES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—Two I.D.S.M.'s.

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel W. D. A. Lentaigne (also mentioned). Major J. N. Mackay.
M.C.	..	Major W. H. B. Oldham. Lieutenant P. F. Bromfield.
I.O.M.	..	Subedar Narbahadur Thapa. 3538 Havildar Bhimsing Gurung (also mentioned). 3625 Havildar Dhanlal Gurung (also mentioned). 4234 Rifleman Balu Pun (also mentioned).
I.D.S.M.	..	6977 Havildar Motilal Gurung. 4019 Naik Sarabjit Gurung. 4168 Naik Ganjabahadur Gurung.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel W. R. Weallens.

- Mentions .. Captain J. L. Hillard.
 Captain D. G. A. Mountford, M.C.
 Captain W. A. C. Milne.
 3721 Havildar Tejbahadur Ale.
 4072 Naik Wazirbahadur Ale.
 5526 Rifleman Nandu Pun.
 4836 Rifleman Ranjit Pun.

5TH ROYAL GURKHA RIFLES (FRONTIER FORCE)

- D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel R. T. Cameron.
 Lieut.-Colonel G. W. S. Burton (also mentioned).
 O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel A. T. Cornwall Jones.
 M.B.E. .. Major R. W. Morland Hughes (also mentioned).
 Subedar Major Dhanbahadur Gurung, O.B.I.
 M.C. .. Captain A. K. Grieve.
 Captain R. G. R. Parry.
 Captain J. W. Arkell.
 Captain V. E. St. G. Denys.
 Lieutenant V. K. Sundaram.
 Subedar Viriparsad Bura.
 I.O.M. .. 7110 Naik Dilbahadur Thapa.
 63180 Rifleman Karnabahadur Thapa.
 I.D.S.M. .. 6930 Havildar Sukhbahadur Gurung.
 6586 Havildar Kishenbahadur Gurung.
 7079 Rifleman Rambahadur Gurung.
 64290 Rifleman Karnabahadur Gurung.
 62639 Rifleman Tekbahadur Thapa.
 Mentions .. Lieut.-Colonel E. P. Townsend.
 Major G. B. Brownrigg.
 Major G. M. Nightingale.
 Subedar Ashbahadur Gurung.
 Jemadar Dhirkabahadur Gurung.
 Jemadar Durgabahadur Thapa.
 6705 Lance-Havildar Manhir Gurung.
 6917 Lance-Naik Jaisora Rana.
 5901 Lance-Naik Lalbahadur Gurung.
 6799 Rifleman Topbahadur.

6TH GURKHA RIFLES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One O.B.E. and one Mention.

C.B.E. & D.S.O. Lieut.-General W. J. Slim, M.C. (also mentioned).

D.S.O.	..	Major-General J. B. Scott, M.C.
		Major-General D. T. Cowan, M.C.
M.B.E.	..	Subedar Ransing Gurung.
Mentions	..	Major J. A. R. Robertson.
		Major T. R. Harrison.

7TH GURKHA RIFLES

O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel A. R. Barker, M.C.
M.C.	..	Major E. S. Holdaway.
		Captain O. R. Gribble.
I.O.M. & I.D.S.M.		Subedar Major Saharman Rai.
I.O.M.	..	7180 Lance-Naik Gaudhan Rai.
I.D.S.M.	..	1288 Havildar Sherbahadur Rai.
		2146 Havildar Harkabahadur Limbu.
		1970 Havildar Narainsing Rai.
		6557 Havildar Kharkabahadur Rai.
		6443 Havildar Singbahadur Rai.
		6468 L/Havildar Padambahadur Rai.
		7140 Naik Dhanbahadur Gurung.
		6782 Naik Jaibahadur Limbu.
		6477 Naik Singdhan Rai.
		2424 Naik Bhaluman Rai.
		7340 Rifleman Saindhoj Rai.
		7664 Rifleman Birbahadur Limbu.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel A. W. Orgill.
		Lieut.-Colonel W. R. B. Williams.
		Major A. O. L. Burke.
		Major A. D. MacConnachie.
		Captain J. B. Soutar.
		Captain R. E. Blair.
		1846 Havildar Bakhatbahadur Limbu.
		1182 Havildar Dorange Limbu.
		2058 Havildar Parbishamsher Rai.
		2414 Lance Naik Harkadhoj Rai.
		1602 Rifleman Bhimbahadur Rai.
		1865 Rifleman Dharanshoj Limbu.

8TH GURKHA RIFLES

D.S.O.	..	Major C. W. Yeates.
M.B.E.	..	Major T. C. Clabburn.

9TH GURKHA RIFLES

D.S.O.	..	Lieut.-Colonel I. A. Roche.
		Captain M. P. F. Jones.

M.C.	..	Captain D. M. Amcore. Captain D. H. Donovan. Captain P. D. Radcliffe. 2nd-Lieutenant J. Hart.
I.O.M.	..	Subedar Major Agandhar Khandka. Subedar Bhimbahadur Sahi. Jemadar Dewansing Basnet. Jemadar Jaibahadur Chand. 1978 Havildar Major Dhurbahadur Adhikari. 1049 Havildar Bhimbahadur Sen.
I.D.S.M.	..	2319 Naik Bimbahadur Khattri. 2430 Naik Chankhabahadur Basnet. 1891 Naik Tambahadur Sahi. 8415 Lance-Naik Damarbahadur Mall. 2470 Lance-Naik Kharkabahadur Khattri. 2566 Lance-Naik Meharsing Adhikari. 2742 Rifleman Netrabahadur Thapa. 2951 Rifleman Nirbahadur Mall. 2667 Rifleman Sombahadur Mall. 2927 Rifleman Jagbahadur Thapa. 2962 Rifleman Manbahadur Karki. 96112 Rifleman Padambahadur Bhandari. 95461 Rifleman Tekbahadur Bhandari. 95593 Rifleman Girbahadur Baniya.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel G. S. Nangle. Major A. A. Mains (twice).

10TH GURKHA RIFLES

I.O.M.	..	Havildar Dalbahadur Limbu.
I.D.S.M.	..	Lance-Naik Uttradhaj Limbu.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel E. G. B. Proctor.

GURKHA PARACHUTE BATTALION

I.D.S.M.	..	Jemadar Narbahadur Thapa. Jemadar Jabbarjang Gurung. 4100 Havildar Gangabahadur Pun.
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ROYAL INDIAN ARMY SERVICE CORPS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—Four O.B.E.'s, five M.B.E.'s, one M.C., four I.D.S.M.'s and fifteen Mentions.

C.B.E.	..	Brigadier T. F. J. Eales.
O.B.E.	..	Colonel A. H. J. Snelling. Lieut.-Colonel A. C. Ellery (also mentioned). Lieut.-Colonel B. E. Hallett.

O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel C. H. Godsland. Lieut.-Colonel J. G. Joyce* *. Lieut.-Colonel F. Oliffe. Lieut.-Colonel S. H. J. Wouffe Flanagan. Lieut.-Colonel R. I. Jones. Lieut.-Colonel F. W. O. Robinson.
M.B.E.	..	Major M. S. Dhillon. Major R. St. E. M. Railton (also mentioned). Captain W. J. Ford. Captain E. E. Bibra. Captain M. D. Framjee. Captain G. C. Murphy. Subedar Major Ghulam Haider. Subedar Mohammed Din.
M.C.	..	2nd-Lieutenant A. K. Barren.
I.O.M.	..	Subedar Ghulam Jan.
I.D.S.M.	..	Subedar Allah Jan. MT/102533 Coy. Havildar Major Shahjan Khan. MT/104832 Havildar Indar Singh. 508620 Naik Rahmat Khan. MT/505558 Naik Mir Alam Khan. MT/509361 Naik Mohammed Abbas. MT/895085 Lance-Naik Lal Khan. 501398 Sepoy Faqir Mohammed. 890423 Sepoy Mohammed Shaffi. MT/759561 Sepoy Habib Ullah. MT/918325 Sepoy Pahelwan Shah. 911356 Lance-Naik Mohammed Sadiq.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel E. V. Hansford, O.B.E. Lieut.-Colonel A. J. Mackay, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel H. C. Franklin, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel J. N. A. Harris. Lieut.-Colonel J. Trevor Davis, M.B.E. (twice). Lieut.-Colonel V. C. Tweedy. Lieut.-Colonel F. W. Harland (twice). Lieut.-Colonel F. C. Tobins. Lieut.-Colonel H. S. Woods, O.B.E. Major A. S. Rose. Major J. A. L. Cowie. Major G. N. Davidson.* Major H. E. Eve, M.C. Major W. T. Hungerford. Major C. J. B. Leakey. Major R. G. N. Leakey (twice). Major J. W. Lewis Bowen.

Mentions	..	Major S. J. White (twice). Major A. R. G. M. Edwards. Major J. M. Neville (twice). Major A. R. Willis. Major G. E. Bench. Major P. F. Pritchard, M.C. Major O. L. Burke. Major E. K. Tarver. Major Baljit Singh. Major J. P. Yewdall. Major W. G. Gould. Major C. M. Clegg. Captain H. Deakes.* Captain W. H. Way. Captain R. K. Karve. Captain M. P. Byrne. Captain A. Coventry. Captain F. H. Cummuskey. Captain W. J. Briggonsshaw. Captain A. L. Cannell. Captain E. R. Craske, M.B.E. Captain J. G. Duncan. Captain A. W. L. Hipsey. Captain R. N. Mulla. Captain A. R. Walton. Captain L. H. Goodhew. Captain J. W. A. Meredith. - Captain H. F. Pope. Captain R. T. Warner. Captain W. B. Gray. Captain J. D. Jackman. Lieutenant A. Joliffe. Lieutenant F. W. Stone. Lieutenant S. W. Woods. 2nd-Lieutenant T. A. Hennessey. 2nd-Lieutenant H. L. Soddi. Subedar Major Chhaju Ram. Subedar Major Sarfaraz Hussain, O.B.I. Subedar Ahmed Khan. Subedar Chet Ram. Subedar Gobind Ram. Subedar Hari Chand. Subedar Pir Said. Subedar Lakhmi Chand. Subedar Trilok Singh. Subedar Janit Singh.
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Mentions	..	Jemadar Abdul Habeeb.
		Jemadar Aighar Ali.
		Jemadar Nawab Ali.
		Jemadar Qasim Ali Shah.
		Jemadar Ali Akbar Shah.
		Jemadar Ganpat Rai Kohli.
		Jemadar Jamail Singh.
		Jemadar Mohammed Ishaq.
		Jemadar Nand Singh.
		Jemadar Ram Krishna.
		Sub-Conductor J. H. N. Murphy.
		Sub-Conductor G. E. Stokes.
		Jemadar (Clerk) G. D. Kohli.
		Jemadar (Clerk) S. J. Jayaram.
		Jemadar (Clerk) T. S. Venkataraman.
		Jemadar (Clerk) P. N. Krishnamurti.
		Jemadar (Clerk) Mohammed Hassan.
		MT/500006 C.Q.M.H. Muzaftar Khan.
		MT/104534 Havildar Sardar Khan.
		MT/105434 Havildar Chatter Singh.
		508242 Havildar Ghulam Hussain.
		SR/12204 Havildar Mohammed Ibrahim.
		MT/508223 Naik Indar Singh.
		MT/103315 Naik Ali Shah.
		505212 Naik Waryam Singh.
		MT/908268 Lance-Naik Ragunath Prabhu.
		MT/105505 Lance-Naik Ghulam Haider.
		MT/200329 Lance-Naik Iman Singh.
		502979 Sepoy Mohammed Farid.
		MT/509354 Sepoy Sakhi Jan.
		MT/889269 Sepoy Sule Khan.
		MT/927981 Sepoy Keshar Singh.
		SR/20985 U.D. Storekeeper Budh Singh.
		SR/18263 U.D. Clerk M. S. Ghanamuthu.
		SR/120161 U.D. Clerk Bhagwan Das.
		SR/120015 L.D. Clerk Ghulam Abbas.
		SR/18795 L.D. Clerk L. Konalik.
		F/738870 Issuer Allah Ditta.

INDIAN ARMY ORDNANCE CORPS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—Two O.B.E.'s, six M.B.E.'s, one B.E.M. and nine Mentions.

O.B.E.	..	Lieut.-Colonel E. O. Burgess.
		Lieut.-Colonel J. H. G. Chapman.
M.B.E.	..	Major E. A. B. Dryer.

M.B.E.	..	Major R. L. Finlayson. Major R. B. Hayes. Major A. Lesson. Major Aghya Singh. Captain A. R. Christodolo. Lieutenant G. E. Field.
I.O.M.	..	O/121782 Havildar Clerk S. R. Kulkarni.
M.M.	..	Conductor J. H. E. White.
B.E.M.	..	O/70230 Havildar Mumir Khan.
Mentions	..	Lieut.-Colonel I. Graham, M.C. Lieut.-Colonel L. A. W. Knight. Lieut.-Colonel G. M. Blythe*. Major L. V. A. Brewster. Major C. H. Sanderson. Major J. A. Day. Major A. J. G. Gould. Major R. H. Metherall. Major W. G. D. Sealy. Major F. M. Trobridge. Major T. J. Williams, D.C.M. Major H. C. Burnett. Captain R. H. Bray. Captain E. D. Morgan. Captain W. Kellard. Lieutenant M. B. Matheson. Lieutenant C. Rear. Lieutenant R. I. Buchanan. Conductor R. Bish. Conductor A. Kerr. Conductor P. E. Smith. Conductor C. Rawson. Sub-Conductor W. H. Thomas. Sub-Conductor P. W. Leech. Sub-Conductor H. S. Bartlett. Sub-Conductor J. H. E. Gutteridge. Sub-Conductor G. P. Platt. Sub-Conductor J. Thompson (twice). Sub-Conductor J. H. Whalley. Sub-Conductor H. F. Flint. Sub-Conductor J. Riley. Sub-Conductor S. F. Thompson. Sub-Conductor J. J. Wilkins. Sub-Conductor A. Sills. Sub-Conductor A. Waters. S/Sergeant E. J. Rolland.

- Mentions .. Sergeant S. R. A. Brown.
 Sergeant C. G. Howe.
 Sergeant G. C. Saunders.
 Sergeant H. Wilmot.
 Subedar Narain Das.
 Jemadar Aslam Shah.
 Jemadar Nur Alam.
 Jemadar Nur Mohammed.
 I.W.O. I Abdul Karim Khan.
 I.W.O. I Sajjad Hussain.
 I.W.O. I Ram Lal.
 I.W.O. II Gopal Krishen.
 I.W.O. II J. Samuel.
 MT/650044 Havildar Sayed Humayun Shah.
 O/70638 Naik Aziz-ul-Rahman.
 8973 Naik Fattah Mohammed.
 O/60010 U.D. Clerk K. T. Xavier.
 O/60147 L.D. Clerk Chunni Lal Dua.
 M/680062 L.D. Storekeeper Prabhdyal.
 Sepoy Arura Mal.
 Chief Hand Qadir Bux.

ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

- M.C. .. Captain J. G. S. Holman.
 Captain T. Reilly.
 Captain L. Bapty.
 Captain W. R. Trilby.
 Captain B. P. Tully.
 Captain J. Watt.

INDIAN ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes" :—One C.B.E., one O.B.E., three M.B.E.'s, six M.C.'s, one D.C.M., four I.D.S.M.'s, one B.E.M. and eleven Mentions.

- D.S.O. .. Lieut.-Colonel G. S. N. Hughes.
 O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel R. L. Khosla.
 Lieut.-Colonel F. Oppenheimer
 Lieut.-Colonel M. Ata-ullah.
 Lieut.-Colonel B. P. Balliga.
 Lieut.-Colonel W. E. R. Dimond, C.I.E.
 Lieut.-Colonel D. R. Thapar.
 Lieut.-Colonel Jagdish Chandra.
 M.B.E. .. Major J. Revans.
 Major J. Hay-Arthur.

- M.B.E.** .. Major J. F. Young.
 Captain J. W. E. White.
 Captain B. de Burca.
 Captain J. W. A. Parsons.
 W. O. I. P. J. Dixon.
 Asst. Surgeon J. H. Carr.
 Subedar Fazal Elahi.
 Jemadar S. Y. Bhagwat.
- M.C.** .. Major G. T. M. Hayes.
 Captain Vedantha Rangachari (also mentioned).
 Captain R. D. D. Birdwood.
 Captain R. B. Sule.
 Captain K. Mariswamappa.
 Captain A. G. J. P. Fernandes.
 Captain Sukhdev Kapila (also mentioned).
 Captain G. F. Adye Curran.
 Captain V. F. Siqueira (also mentioned).
 Captain Abdul Kadir.
 Captain Rattan Singh Sahi.
 Captain N. A. Subramanian.
 Captain C. Arumainayagam.
- I.D.S.M.** .. Jemadar Thakur Singh.
 21293 Havildar H. David.
 12347 Havildar Lal Singh.
 H/50252 Havildar Mohammed Yakub.
 H/83122 Lance-Naik Mohammed Yusaf.
 40771 N/Sepoy C. R. Sundra Babu.
 85340 Sepoy Rozario.
- Mentions** .. Brigadier B. C. Ashton (twice).
 Colonel G. M. Moffatt, O.B.E.
 Lieut.-Colonel Bhagwan Das Khurana.
 Lieut.-Colonel H. W. Mulligan.
 Lieut.-Colonel V. E. M. Lee.
 Lieut.-Colonel H. R. B. Gibson.
 Lieut.-Colonel R. A. Logan, O.B.E.
 Lieut.-Colonel K. S. Master, M.C.
 Lieut.-Colonel D. Sanyal.
 Lieut.-Colonel B. J. Hajra.
 Lieut.-Colonel C. S. Gamble.
 Lieut.-Colonel H. B. McEvoy.
 Lieut.-Colonel A. E. Kingston.
 Lieut.-Colonel P. L. O'Neill.
 Major D. Datt.
 Major Assa Singh.
 Major M. K. Afridi.
 Major V. A. Edge.

- Mentions . . Major G. B. Jackson.
 Major H. W. Farrell.
 Major K. Satyanarayana.
 Major D. F. Eastcott.
 Captain A. Krishnaswamy.
 Captain S. M. Basu.
 Captain N. K. Mitra.
 Captain Mohammed Abbas.
 Captain W. J. Young.
 Captain M. R. Chowdhury.
 Captain G. B. Dickson.
 Captain A. K. Mitra.
 Captain H. C. Rogers.
 Captain R. Y. Taylor*.
 Lieutenant Raghubir Singh Rao.
 Lieutenant G. M. Diwan.
 Lieutenant K. S. Pillai.
 Lieutenant Nazir Ahmed.
 Lieutenant T. H. S. Silvester.
 Asst. Surgeon F. J. Barby.
 Asst. Surgeon C. E. Watts.
 Asst. Surgeon D. J. R. Snow.
 Asst. Surgeon L. C. Emmett.
 Asst. Surgeon G. T. Wrafter.
 Subedar Jawahar Lall Ahuja.
 Jemadar Mohan Lall.
 Jemadar P. C. Ray.
 Jemadar R. N. Thurkral.
 Jemadar Sujan Singh.
 Jemadar S. P. Chaturvedi.
 3207 Havildar Kishan Lal.
 44080 Havildar Bahawal Khan.
 C/2128 Havildar Balmokand, B.E.M.
 210042 Havildar Balour Ali.
 12142 Havildar Hakim Khan.
 12345 Havildar Hira Lal.
 892 Havildar R. N. Prasad.
 8081 Havildar Ram Krishen.
 11984 Naik Prem Singh.
 H/10030 Naik F. C. Sharma.
 1598 N/Sepoy Hira Baleb.
 90228 Sepoy Govind Singh.
 12961 Sepoy Sardar Khan.
 199088 Watercarrier Matadin.
 100432 Watercarrier Jangi Singh.
 93764 Batman Man Singh.

INDIAN ARMY CORPS OF CLERKS

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One M.B.E. and two Mentions.

D.C.M.	..	Conductor J. Threlfall.
M.B.E.	..	Conductor G. H. Biggin. Lieutenant E. J. Lloyd. Conductor J. H. Birchall. Conductor J. G. Harding. Sub-Conductor W. J. Morrow. U.D. Clerk Bhag Singh.
Mentions	.	Lieutenant J. H. Culley. Conductor E. J. Stone. Conductor J. C. Seimgeour. Conductor J. D. Angus. Conductor K. E. Kelling. Sub-Conductor W. Harrison. Sub Conductor C. L. Field. S/Sergeant J. F. W. Herod. Sergeant E. Carr (twice). Sergeant A. Davison. Sergeant J. L. Leithgow. Sergeant E. H. Leslie. Sergeant W. Search*. Sergeant H. W. Stubbs. L. D. Clerk O. Madhavan. L. D. Clerk Manohar Lal Suri. I. W. O. Abdul Khaliq.

INDIAN INTER-SERVICES PUBLIC RELATIONS

M.B.E.	..	Captain M. K. U. Nayar.
M.C.	..	Captain M. L. Katju.

INDIAN STATE FORCES

JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE FORCES

Awards shown in "The Tiger Strikes":—One M.C. and three I.D.S.M.'s.

Mentions	..	Captain Jaswant Singh. Lieutenant S. M. Murtaza. Subedar Said Beg. Signalman Nur Mohammed. Signalman Shambu Nath.
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HYDERABAD STATE FORCES

I.O.M. .. Lance-Naik Zubilla Khan.
I.D.S.M. .. Subedar Major Shaikh Mohammed.
 Jemadar Shaikh Ahmed.

GWALIOR STATE FORCES

O.B.E. .. Lieut.-Colonel S. Misra, O.B.I.
I.D.S.M. .. Driver Devi Dyal.

TRIPURA STATE FORCES

I.O.M. .. Lance-Naik Mimal Deb.
I.D.S.M. .. Subedar Mingma Lama.
 Subedar Pargit Gurung.
 Jemadar Makeswar Thapa.
 Havildar Jaikarna Rai

